

jeevadhara

REGIONALISM VS NATIONALISM

Edited by
Felix Wilfred

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Regionalism vs Nationalism

Edited by

Felix Wilfred

Jeevadhara

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Editorial

Attachment to one's land, culture, language and ethnic roots is as old as humanity. But it has assumed new contours in the context of modern global developments. Known as regionalism in contemporary times, it has become an important weapon for a people's self-assertion, defence of their identity and rights in the face of larger entities which erode their collective selfhood.

Nation-state is the political institution with which regionalism comes in direct confrontation. With what appears to be an inherent tendency for centralizing and homogenizing, nationalism professes a different set of values with a strong accent on power and control. And yet, a genuine nationalism that is centered on the people and reflecting in its spirit and structures the actual situation of plurality need not contradict the legitimacy of regionalism.

Regionalism vs nationalism is not simply a theoretical discourse; it is, as we know from experience, a matter of deadly serious consequences, with many lives at stake. The present number of *Jeevadharma* is devoted to the study of this intricate question which has its ultimate philosophical and theological anchorage in the problem of the relationship between plurality and unity. The context of the study is our experience in India and in South Asia at large.

Of the six articles, three are devoted to the analysis of the ground-realities. Peter Haokip from the North East, gives us an inside picture and perception of regional aspirations. Professor G. K. Prasad leads us to the analysis of current political situation marked by regionalization of politics. Professor Suriyanarayanan reflects on the asymmetry that exists in the larger region of South Asia and the implications of this fact for inter-state relationships and regional cooperation.

The other three articles relate variously the issue of regionalism-nationalism to Christianity. The contribution of Maria Arul

Raja explores within the Biblical history different models that depict the assertion of the periphery. M. Amaladoss offers us a critical ecclesiological reflection against the backdrop of our Indian experience of regionalism vs nationalism. Finally my own article tries to show that regionalism does not contradict nationalism and it (regionalism) is closer to the spirit of Christianity which can contribute to its strengthening, and thus ultimately serve the cause of harmonious cohesion and integration of our country.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to all the writers for their articles. In particular I would like to thank my colleagues — Prof. Suriyanarayanan and Prof. G. K. Prasad — for their contributions in their respective fields of competence, and above all for their lively interest in the present issue of *Jeevadhara* in a true spirit of dialogue on national issues, cutting across religious borders.

Chennai

Felix Wilfred

Identity and Integration

From the Perspective of Tribals of North East India¹

In this article, Peter Haokip, a tribal himself — originally from Manipur and now living in Shillong — discusses the root causes for the divide that exists between the mainland and North East India. He then goes on to investigate the conditions for an encounter and integration with the rest of India, that will respect the freedom and selfhood of the tribal people and their quest for identity. In this context, he evaluates the role of Christian Churches and missionaries positively but at the same time critically.

Every North East Indian tribal travelling anywhere in India beyond Calcutta has a hard time trying to convince other 'mainland' Indians about his or her Indianness. Vir Sanghvi, the editor of the magazine *Sunday*, has pin-pointed the ignorance of the rest of the country regarding the North East: "The sad truth is that the north-east is at the periphery of our consciousness. We are dimly aware that India includes several states peopled largely by men and women with high cheekbones but know little else about the region" and the only response one gets is: "Don't they have tribal dances?" or "Weren't they head-hunters at one stage?"² A journalist from Arunachal quoted by Sanghvi sums up their feelings: "We are just across the border from the Chinese. We look like them. We think like them. What is the logic in claiming to be part of India when nobody in Delhi knows who we are".³ Thus "the cultural chasm between the people of the northeastern India and those of the mainland"⁴ is deep. Is there a possibility

1. This article reflects mainly on the tribals of the N. E. India. But some of the things may be valid for other tribals in the rest of India.

2. V. Sanghvi, "Can the twain meet?" *Sunday* (7-13 April, 1996), 8.

3. Ibid. 9.

4. S. Hazarika, "Insurgency in North East India", *Eastern Panorama* (September, 1995) 20.

of, at least, narrowing down the chasm. This article will address the issue, first, by highlighting some of the reasons for the rift, and then indicate possible directions for integration based on the recognition and acceptance of each other's separate identity and equality. It will also point out how the Christian Churches and the tribals themselves can play their parts.

Roots of the Chasm

If the cultural, emotional and psychological links between the people of mainland India and that of the North East are as narrow as the geographical one⁵, what might be the reasons? The policies and actions of the Central Government are the first to be questioned. No less a person than General Choudhury admitted that "sheer force has not been able to solve insurgency and for that a process of positive dialogue has to be initiated. But pre-occupied New Delhi has neither the time nor the inclination to try anything different from the policy of suppression".⁶ Arun Shourie alleged that "intelligence information received by the Government establishes the help and guidance which specified missionary groups have been giving to secessionist groups in Nagaland and Manipur".⁷ What seems true and evident, for instance, is: "the ethnic strife between the Nagas and the Kuki tribe has been purposely fanned by the authorities".⁸ The Government has used the opportunity to "induct more forces and sustain such Draconian laws as the Armed Forces Special Powers and the Disturbed Areas Acts. But there is hardly any conciliation move".⁹ This typical response of the state "to call in the army and invoke sweeping powers of search and detention" has turned many troubled spots of the North East into occupied territories or training grounds for the army, and is alienating and antagonising the people.

Another allegation asserts that "political parties are responsible for fuelling ethnic unrest in the North East".¹⁰ This may explain why, for example, the ethnic clash between the Kukis and the Nagas is showing no signs of ending. Another reason for the sense of insecurity and alienation of the people of the North East

5. Ibid. 20

6. K. Nayar. "Defiance by the Nagas: Between the Lines", *Sentinel* (March 8, 1995).

7. A Shourie, *Missionaries in India* (ASA, 1994), 205.

8. K. Nayar, Defiance ...

9. Ibid.

10. S. Hazarika, *Insurgency ...* 21

is the attempt by the Government to assimilate them into the dominant group of the mainland in the name of integration, because "many ... regard integration as synonymous with assimilation ... Integration is not assimilation. Assimilation involves a total loss of cultural identity of the group that is being assimilated and its absorption into the dominant group on the latter's terms. This leads to antagonism, tension and increasing alienation each from the other".¹¹ In addition to these, "the centralised tendency of the pretentious federal system of the country ..." giving the North East which covers "8 percent of the total geographical area ..., less than 3 percent representation in Parliament", making them "lonely travellers, aggrieved and frustrated" in the "number-based political manoeuvres", is what "naturally generates aggressive rethinking, bringing them closer and closer to extra-constitutional methods and means".¹² Besides, branding "the aspirations of all non-Aryan ethnic groups of the North East as secessionist and destabilising ... is the main objective reason for insurgency in the North East".¹³ In short, "two factors — an unethical policy of national integration together with the unresolved nationality question, and the number-oriented decision making system of the polity"¹⁴ are the main factors. Others are all secondary. Because of all these, "had there been an ideologically organised revolutionary group, there would probably have been a protracted people's war rather than mere insurgency".¹⁵ Is there, then, a future for them with mainland India?

"Can the twain meet?"¹⁶

The tribals are a pragmatic people. Political events of the past have joined them to mainland India as one nation. History cannot be and need not be unwritten or re-written always. The way forward is: to remain to be one nation with the rest of India without losing their distinctive identity and cultural heritage. This is integration correctly understood and realised for it means: "The process of bringing about or achieving equal membership of a

11. V. V. Rao. "North East India: Problems and suggestions", *The North Eastern Research Bulletin*, Vol. 4: (The Centre for Sociological Study of the Frontier Region, Department of Sociology: Dibrugarh University, (Summer 1974) 17

12. P. S. Datta. *India's North-East A Study in Transition* (Har-Anand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, (New Delhi, 1992) 52.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid. 50-51.

15. Ibid. 53.

16. V. Sanghvi, *Can the twain ...* 8

population or social group; removal or absence of discrimination against groups or people on racial or cultural grounds".¹⁷ As it is a process, the goodwill and the active cooperation of both the parties are required to achieve the goal. However, the major partner must take the initiative. From the analysis above, the major partner is the authorities and the public in mainland India. The basic grievance of the North East seems to me to be lack of recognition and acceptance on the part of the people in the rest of the country and the consequent absence of the sense of belonging felt by the people of the region. Hence the first step in the right direction on the part of the people from the mainland would be, in the words of Sanghvi: "to pay more attention to the north-east".¹⁸ He goes on to say: "it seems to me that the problems of the north-east grow because of lack of attention. Contrast the way in which the Punjab militancy was handled with the shoot-them-all approach to the Naga insurgency. Compare the time and effort devoted to the Kashmir problem with the total lack of attention paid to the north-eastern insurgencies".¹⁹ Further more, "even well-meaning human rights organisations get more agitated about Kashmir than they do about Manipur though both are integral parts of India".²⁰ Of course, this may not solve all the problems "but it would help if we started paying more attention to the north-east; if we learn more about it; and if we visited ourselves. Things may not get better immediately, but there is no doubt that the eventual consequence of the attention would be that they would improve. And more than anything else, it would demonstrate to the residents of the seven key states that the rest of us don't regard them as "Chinks" or potential militants but as Indians. That alone would be something".²¹ I wish the policy makers in Delhi recognize the wisdom in these lines.

Vir Sanghvi also says that "the Indian tax-payer is subsidising the north-east" and "the insurgency has cost the armed forces Rs. 10,000 crores"²² over the last decade. The Indian Government and public must realise that money cannot buy everything. It cannot buy the trust, confidence and the sense of belonging of the people of the North East. Besides much of the

17. L. Brown. (ed.), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Vol. I (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993), 1386.

18. V. Sanghvi, "Can the twain ... 8.

19. Ibid. 9.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

money is spent on maintaining and training the oppressive armed forces who may soon outnumber the local population. Further more, money has become a means of oppression, as Kuldip Nayar says: "While New Delhi's earlier policy was purely oppression, violating all human rights, now it is sheer money, which is spreading like water."²³

This article does not claim to suggest alternative ways of governing the North East. However, the only viable alternative is in the direction of more autonomy, a recognition of the uniqueness of the region and its people. Most writers on the North East think of it only as a problem. 'How to solve a problem like the North East?' The North East and its insurgencies are not merely a bundle of problems to be solved somehow, but a people like the rest with legitimate rights and claims. In fact, insurgencies here should be classified "under the broad category of 'political movement'"²⁴, "sustained collective mobilisation through either informal or formal organisation"²⁵, which is "generally oriented towards bringing about change, either partial or total, in the existing system of relationships, values and norms..."²⁶ Understanding the insurgencies of the region this way can pave the way to meeting the legitimate aspirations of its people. "A higher philosophy of togetherness and sharing of social assets in both theory and practice"²⁷ are needed. Such an approach will be "an ethical solution to the present socio-economic and socio-political malady" and "be the only permanent answer to the insurgency in the North East".²⁸ To realise these goals, men of vision on both sides of the present divide are the need of the hour and the "possibilities are endless, if the vision exists".²⁹

The Role of Christian Churches³⁰

The Christian Churches have a strong presence in the North

23. K. Nayar, *Defiance ...*

24. P. S. Datta, *India's North East ...* 49.

25. M. S. A. Rao, "Conceptual Problems in the Study of Social Movements" in M. S. A. Rao (ed.), *Social Movements in India* (New Delhi, Manohar, 1984) 1-2, quoted by P. S. Datta, *India's North East*, 49.

26. *Ibid.* 27. P. S. Datta, *India's North East*, 53.

28. *Ibid.* 54. 29. S. Hazarika, *Insurgency*, 23.

30. The role envisaged here will broadly be valid for all the Christian denominations in the North East, but it will apply to the Catholic Church in particular, with which the author, is more familiar.

East, especially in the hill regions, with the exception of Arunachal³¹ which, according to Indian Currents Year Book 1991³², has only 4.32 per cent Christians; Mizoram with 83.81 per cent tops the list with Nagaland close behind, 80.21; Meghalaya, 52.62 and Manipur has 29.69 per cent.

It is amply clear that the hill tribes of the North East have thrown their lot with Christianity. Arun Shourie, in his book "Missionaries in India" has thrown aspersions on the motives of conversion by the missionaries as well of the people converted.³³ If the tribals have embraced Christianity en masse, for whatever reason, it was their decision, in their best interest. No one has any right to question this. If Hindu missionaries or that of any other religion had come first and preached their religion and had done so much for the good of the tribals as the Christian missionaries did for them, they would have embraced that religion too with the same enthusiasm. They realised the good tree of Christianity from its fruits and for that reason, they became Christians. It was and is the best thing that happened and is happening to the tribals of the North East. But for Christianity and its missionaries, they might still be roaming the thick jungles of the region, hunting for survival and for each other's head. Of course, they might also be paraded for show on the Republic and Independence Days.

The Bible both Old and New Testaments are full of instances of God's special predilection for the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. The tribals have recognised in the missionaries the embodiment of God's special concern for them. That is the reason why they have embraced the religion these missionaries follow and proclaim. It is a privilege and a tremendous responsibility for the missionaries to be seen to be the hope of the tribals and to be entrusted with the shaping of their destiny. The trust placed by the tribals on the missionaries has not so far been

31. Arunachal is still officially a 'forbidden land' for Christian missionaries, even though other organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission is officially encouraged, promoted and subsidised.

32. J. Vallamattam, (compiler), "Religions of India", *Indian Currents Year Book*, 1991 (Mayur Vihar, Delhi) 027.

33. A. Shourie, *Missionaries ...*, esp. 200-242. See also reviews of the book by Khushwant Singh, "Eating Missionaries", *The Week*, June 12, 1994, 20-21 and Mani Shankar Aiyar, "Mission of hate", *Frontline*, June 17, 1994, 16-17.

betrayed. If the tribals today are aware of their human dignity and are gaining some self confidence to stand side by side with others, they owe it to the efforts of the missionaries. But it is only a beginning. The way ahead is still long and winding. Many challenges lie ahead. The task of the missionary is to bring to fulfilment the good work he has initiated. He has to read the signs of the times. The situation in the North East is becoming ever more misty and cloudy. Insurgencies and ethnic troubles are on the increase. The 'insider-outsider' divide is widening. There is a climate of mistrust, animosity and hatred. What are the reasons behind all these. What are the factors leading up to these? These and similar questions need to be urgently addressed.

Recently some diocesan priests of the region³⁴ who have specialised in different branches of theology, sat together with three Bishops of the region to reflect on the problems and prospects of the North East. The feeling was that the positive values lurking behind the external symptoms of violence and hostility are the cultural awakening of many ethnic groups wanting to be recognised and accepted. Unfortunately violence has often been used to achieve these positive goals. Perhaps it is the only weapon they know or see being used in many parts of the world. Have we got alternative ways and means?

The first challenge, then, is to have a critical retrospection and ask ourselves: Have the christian values of love, peace and harmonious co-existence taken roots? Is it not true that the christian values we preach have sunk only skin-deep in the hearts and minds of our people? Have we been the promoters of our people, their legitimate aspirations and hopes? If our people have reached a stage of being able to identify their needs and aspirations and are able to lay claim to these, we cannot leave them to fend for themselves at this critical juncture.

Promoting the people and their legitimate aspirations need not always mean performing some super human acts of bravery or sacrifice. More often than not, it simply means showing them

34. The gathering took place at the "North East Diocesan Social Forum", Guwahati, Assam. It was the first meeting of the kind. Twenty three priests and three Bishops of the region were present. The gathering decided to meet annually and the forum was christened: "North East Diocesan Priests Forum for Theological Reflection".

basic human decency like respecting their human dignity in the way we speak to them and treat them. Gustavo Gutierrez, in one of the interviews he gave, made a very simple but profound point. He said: "... we need to have friends among the poor. Our close friends are persons similar to us, with similar backgrounds and interests and tastes. But the poor are so often the object of our work, not the object of our friendship. Friendship supposes equality. We cannot love some one if we do not place him or her on the same level. Love presupposes equality. Without equality there is no love or affection. There may be work or commitment but not love. Christians have perhaps accepted too easily the idea of working *for* the poor. We must change this, and because it is a process, we need to begin right now".³⁵

The same principles can be applied to missionaries working among the tribals of the North East. The tribals should not only be 'the objects of our work' but also 'objects of our friendship'. And as friendship 'presupposes equality', such a friendship would mean like saying: 'you are my equal'. This can create wonders in the psyche of the ordinary tribal, perhaps, more than many apparently wonderful things a missionary does for him. A missionary who promotes people and their aspirations will be more busy with living people than with bricks and mortar; more interested in building up living communities than museums for housing the dead artifacts; will be more preoccupied to prevent people from dying than waiting to bury the dead only. Indeed, such a missionary will try to empower rather than exercise power over them. When people are allowed to grow as full human beings, they will feel less threatened, and when they feel less threatened, they will be more tolerant and be ready to live side by side with others and be able to integrate themselves with others to join the so-called 'national mainstream'.

The North East has been described as "Asia in miniature, a place where the brown and yellow races meet and mingle".³⁶ It is equally be spoken of as 'India in miniature'. Therefore the harmonious living together of people from different parts of India can be a model for the rest of the country. People who originally

35. G. Gutierrez, "The Quincentenary", *Sedos Bulletin*, 24 (6, 7, 1992) 183.

36. S. Hazarika, *S Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace from India's Northeast* (Viking, Penguin India, 1994) xviii.

come from the mainland have a duty and a responsibility to make the North East and its people known and respected by their brothers and sisters backhome. Similarly they also need to make the Northerners know more about the mainland and its people. In this connection, the Catholic missionaries, the majority of whom come from mainland India, have a special responsibility. They can be ambassadors of harmonious and peaceful integration between the North East and the rest of India. The love they have and the heroic sacrifices they make for the people of the North should give them the credibility to be goodwill emissaries of the region to the rest of India. In the same way, their concern and care for the people of the North East should dispel from the minds of the locals the misgivings about the intentions of people from outside. In an area torn by ethnic strife, like Manipur and Nagaland, missionaries from the mainland are the only people today who can move about the area without fear and anxiety. People of the region caught in this net of ethnic strife place high hopes on them. They do not expect them to be passive spectators but active promoters of peace and harmony. In short, we can identify a threefold function for the missionaries today: They can enhance the identity of the tribals, promote peaceful co-existence among them and enable the tribals to integrate with the rest of the country with honour and dignity.

The Role of the Tribals

Without negating the validity of all that has been said before, the most important players in the game are the tribals themselves. The world is becoming a village. The trend is to stand united. The pragmatic sense of the tribals must prevail. The divisive tendencies do not augur well for the tribals. The different nations of Europe are trying to unite as one country. The Americas are also trying to come closer. We need not use their weapons to destroy each other and make them more rich. What future is there when many of our young men and women are sacrificed on the altars of violence and hatred? Self-assertion and promotion of one's identity need not be at the expense of others. On the contrary, one enhances one's identity more in a heterogeneous atmosphere. The best in a person emerges in a situation of healthy competition. Hence other ethnic groups or races should not be considered threats, but as opportunity to our human growth and development.

The Constitutional safeguards of quotas and reservations for tribals can often encourage laziness and mediocrity. They were meant to remedy disadvantages of background, facilities and opportunities. They create for us opportunities and facilities we often do not have through no fault of our own. The pejorative use of the word 'tribal' have made many people think that the tribals are second class citizens. Many tribals also believe in this and behave accordingly. While they cannot remove the prejudices of others, they should overcome their own feeling of inferiority. Like the black Americans who say: 'Black is beautiful' believe it and be proud of it so also the tribals must be able to say: To be a tribal is something beautiful and good; believe it and be proud of it. According to Jack Ensign Addington, the author of "100% Mind Power: The Psychogenesis Way", written after sixteen years of being a practising attorney in the business world, plus twenty years in the ministry, "man is his worst enemy ... each had, in some way, underrated himself and his capacity to succeed in life; each had failed to direct his own mind into the right avenues that would bring him fulfilment; each one thought that life was against him when the truth was, he was against himself".³⁷ The same things could be said about us, tribals. We are often our own worst enemies. Nobody is going to extend christian charity to us, unless we help ourselves first.

Let me conclude this article by saying that these thoughts and reflections are being offered to make the great nation of India greater. It needs sagacity in governing, which we can draw from India's ancient and rich traditions of wisdom, tolerance and peaceful co-existence. India embraces within her fold, different peoples, races and cultures. The goal towards which we need to move is to make no one feel threatened, but find enhancement and fulfilment of his or her dreams and desires, hopes and aspirations. It is for this cause the Father of the Nation lived, strived for and gave his life.

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37. J. E. Addington *100 per cent Mind Power: The Psychogenesis Way* (Indus An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers India) vii.

Regionalism vs Nationalism

Some Ecclesiological Reflections

In this essay, the author shows, against the background of Indian experience, how the regional-national tensions are reflected also in the life of the Church. He then critically examines positions which refer to culture, historical tradition, geography or bishop as the point of reference for the self-understanding of a local Church, and concludes with the community of people responding to the Gospel as defining the local Church. He briefly reflects on the issue of autonomy and communion, and particularly on the need of new structures of communion. In the light of these reflections he draws out implications for the Indian Church and the political realm in what concerns the region-nation tensions.

Tensions between regional and national perspectives are not peculiar to India. Movements for regional autonomy or independence can be seen, not only in conflictual situations like the former Yugoslavia and Sri Lanka, but also in seemingly more peaceful situations like Belgium, Canada and Italy. The source of these tensions is the feeling of a group of people that they share not only a special identity based on ethnicity, language, religion and co-habitation in a particular geographical area, but also, based on these, common political and economic interests. If the source of identity is religion or ethnicity we call it communalism. If, on the contrary, the geography provides the point of unity we call it regionalism. However, the different factors are often found together supporting each other. By contrast, a nation need not be based on factors like ethnicity, religion or language. The nation-states are political entities, created by historical circumstances and held together by political power. The political unity is supported by force, in defence both against external aggression and against internal subversion. Many African nation-states, for example, are the creation of colonial powers, national boundaries often dividing ethnic groups. The division of the Indian subcontinent into India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is not a natural one. Once created, the nation-states may acquire a certain unity through common political institutions and shared historical

traditions over a period. In an era of economic multinationals and globalization it is difficult to speak of the economy as a factor of national identity or unity. But the emergence of such unity is not inevitable and could be jeopardized by movements for autonomy or independence.

I am sure that these factors will be analysed much more extensively in other articles in this issue. But I am evoking them here to set the context for my own discussion on the implications for the Church of such regional-national tensions. The first element of this context is then that, while the regions may have some natural point of unity, the unity of the nation may be quite artificial and may not go beyond the internal force used to maintain it.

The regional-national tension has its natural impact on the Church. When we think of the Church, we think of it as a communion of local Churches. But one could raise many questions: what is the identity of a local Church? How small or large it needs to be? Should this identity be uniform? Is the communion only universal or can it have less than universal manifestations? Can we speak of a national Church? Before analysing these questions, let us look at our experience.

The Experience of the Church in India

Immediately after the Second Vatican Council India had a National Seminar (1968) which had delegates who represented the whole nation. At this Seminar the multiplicity of Ritual or Individual Churches in India was experienced as a problem and a consensus to move slowly towards one Indian Rite was declared. Almost thirty years afterwards the three Individual Churches seem to be moving apart, with four National Conferences of Bishops: one each for each of the three Ritual Churches and one for all of them together. Such divisions are justified in terms of particular histories and cultures. The divisions are further heightened by giving priority to personal jurisdiction over geographical togetherness. The people however have successfully contested such priority.

When the National Liturgical Commission came up with some proposals to inculturate the liturgy, the reactions from different parts of the nation were not uniform. The tribal Churches felt,

rightly, that these reforms did not really concern them since they did not take into account their own cultures. The response from areas where the Churches were still young was different from that from areas where the Churches had been present for a longer period. These differences finally led to the decision to assign liturgy to the responsibility of the Regional Conference of Bishops.

Caste identities of Christian communities have always played a role in ecclesiastical politics, in parishes, dioceses and religious congregations. This has become aggravated in recent times owing to the emergence of awareness among the Dalit communities, who have started to assert their identity vocally.

At a wider level, National Episcopal Conferences have been established after the Second Vatican Council. These have also come together in various ways to establish larger "regional" units like the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Efforts made by national or regional Conferences to take on a role of teaching have been looked at with suspicion, and attempts have been made to control such independence by the central authority. Whether these conferences have the role of teaching has been even questioned.

In Asia, we have at least one country where we have "national" Churches, namely China. While the Catholic Church seems divided, at least administratively, a national Protestant Church has emerged. National Churches, in any case, are more common in the Protestant tradition even in other countries.

Unity in Pluralism

At the level of theological reflection and expression, while there is general agreement that the Church is a communion of local Churches, there is no clear idea about what constitutes a local Church. Some would say that every eucharistic community is a local Church, since, as the adage goes: "the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church". Others think that the local Church is, strictly speaking, the diocese, since it is with a Bishop that a local Church has the fullness of ministry. But a diocese today can have multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities. Other discussions seem to take for granted that a local Church is characterized by its roots in a particular culture. We also have the phenomenon of many ecclesial movements like the Basic Ecclesial Communities, the Neo-Catechumenate and various Charismatic movements, all of whom claim a special identity and

autonomy, even within a parish, sometimes with higher ecclesiastical approval.

The experiential ecclesial situation, then, is one of unity in pluralism. The question is how does one make practical sense of it. I am raising this question not so much at the administrative level, though it is not irrelevant to my concerns. The rising tension between regionalism and nationalism does affect the Church in its own way, especially its mission of reconciliation and unity. In this context, does the Church simply play out the tensions in its own specific area, or does the Church have a prophetic word, at least in theory, even if not in practice, to contribute to a creative resolution or, at least, the wise handling of the tensions?

Since we are talking about the Church in the context of "regionalism vs nationalism" we need not explore the reality, experience and problems of communion at the level of the universal Church. Let us limit our attention to what can be seen as various levels of unity and difference among local Churches.

What is it that makes a local Church?

There is agreement among theologians that every local Church, whatever be its contours, is a Church in the full sense of the word. But what is it that sets the boundaries of a local Church? Or in other words, what is it that gives a local Church its internal unity? One could propose various criteria.

One obvious criterion is *culture*. The Theology Advisory Committee of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences suggests, by linking its discussion on the local Church with its discussion on inculturation, that the root of the identity of a local Church is its culture.¹ But our Indian experience has shown that culture is a very ambiguous and complex reality. We started with the idea that India had one culture. This may be true in a broad sense if we compare it with China or with Europe. But looked at in itself, India is seen not merely as a mosaic of regional cultures but also includes enclaves of different tribal cultures that have preserved their special identity. There is also a difference between the elite level, at which there may be more of a unity and the folk level, at which the differences may be more sharp. Pushing the differences further one can say that, at the moment, the more

1. *Theses on the Local Church: A Theological Reflection in the Asian Context*, FABC Papers 60, (Hong Kong, FABC, 1991)

than 4000 *jatis* in India have their distinctive cultural characteristics in terms of ways of life and social relationships. The Dalit movements have shown that what is seen superficially as one culture may also be divided between dominant and subaltern cultures. Given such complexity, culture does not seem to be the real basis of identity of a local Church, nor can it be the element that will unite local Churches either.

If we look at the current organization of the Church in India into different Ritual national Episcopal Conferences and into national and regional Episcopal Conferences in the Latin Rite one sees a double principle. On the one hand we have the force of *historical tradition*, which may become cultural tradition through long practice. But history can also change and lead to change. As the National Seminar of 1968 desired we are not bound by history and we can move towards one new Rite which is Indian. On the other hand we have the principle of *geography*. With each local Bishop, ruling over a particular territory, claiming rather absolute autonomy, geography seems to be a decisive element in identifying a local Church. But given the cultural and ethnic variety that may exist within a given diocese one can wonder whether the diocese, in practice, is more than an administrative unit.

One might counter this with the argument that the real principle of unity and identity of a local Church is the *Bishop*. This is of course a purely institutional principle. A bishop is primarily a servant — minister — to a community. He is the visible guarantee as a successor to the Apostles of the authenticity of the Gospel. He also has the function of coordination. He is not the one who gives an identity to the community. We could rather say that his identity is that of the community he is serving. This is also true at wider levels like regional or national Episcopal Conferences. They are symbols of the local Church. They do not constitute it.

Local Church as Community

I think that we have to say that a local Church is constituted by a community of people who respond to the Good News. The reasons that bring together such a community may be very diverse. They may be natural or associative groups. For example the Basic Christian Communities take various forms: sometimes they are groups of people living in the same geographical area. At other

times they are people who come together for a particular purpose. Similarly many new religious movements function as associative groups. What makes such a group Church is not that they have chosen to come together but that they listen to the Gospel and respond to it in their life and action. But the reasons for which they have come together may be very diverse. Small groups coalesce into bigger groups at various levels, through their representatives, for a common purpose: that of responding to the Gospel more efficiently at various levels. One important and symbolic (sacramental) way of showing such response is the celebration of the Eucharist. Though the community and the Eucharist are mutually related, the community has a certain priority over the Eucharist.

I would therefore suggest that what makes a local Church is a community that comes together in the process of responding to, and therefore witnessing to, the Gospel. This coming together may take place at various levels in various ways. It may be parochial, diocesan, regional or national. It need not take only geographic forms. It can have various associative forms too. I may note in passing that associative groupings, cutting across parish boundaries, are a widely prevalent factor of modern times. It is also possible that a particular person may belong to different communities, geographical and associative, at the same time. I wonder whether the term "local Church" refers accurately to this reality, since the word "local" has an exclusively geographical reference. It is better perhaps to speak simply of Churches and of communion of Churches.

Autonomy and Communion

If what constitutes a group into a Church is its active response to the Word of God which it lives and celebrates, then the local Church is autonomous in being Church because it is free and can be and has to be creative in responding to the Good News in its particular life-situation. But because it recognizes the universality of the Gospel, it is always open to other groups similarly responding to the Gospel in their specific situations. It is not merely open, but even actively seeks to enter into contact with them and collaborate with them because it knows that God's saving plan embraces the whole universe and all peoples and situations. While seeking collaboration it also respects the autonomy of the other Churches.

The principle of such higher unity is not merely the mutual recognition of the same Word and the same Spirit active in the different Churches, but their common call to the same mission and the needs of the mission for efficient service. While mutual recognition may be enough for communion, it is the needs of mission that leads to more organizational structures.

In the early Church, the Bishop was seen as representative of the Church, and when a new Bishop was elected, he sent letters of communion to other Bishops seeking communion. Thus he became part of a college, which was not a permanent structure, but a network of mutual recognition. Such mutual recognition is further promoted through exchange of information and even resources. The Canon of the New Testament must have come into being through the mutual sharing among different Churches of the various written documents like the Gospels and the Letters of the Apostles. Already at the time of St. Paul the Churches were also encouraged to help other Churches in need. Missionaries also may have moved, on the pattern of the Apostles, from one Church to another.

The Bishops came together in Council when the Churches faced a common crisis, particularly when the very source of their life, namely the specificity of the Good News, was threatened by contrary teaching. The communion of the Church that was visible and functional in this manner took more organizational forms when the Church was officially recognized by the State and was used by the State as an aid to political unity. Some of the early Councils were gathered and presided over by emperors who were certainly pursuing their own political agenda in posing as the defenders of the faith and of the unity of the Church.

Structures of unity can be means of service and coordination and/or means of control. Churches can have communion without any elaborate structures. The needs of a common mission could indicate the need for structures of service and coordination. Structures of control however do not seem to be necessary for promoting or living communion. Perhaps the only structure of control used by the early Church to promote and defend communion was the exclusion of some one seen to be destructive of communion.

Structures of Communion

We keep saying that authority in the Church or in the communion of Churches is for service. This service is for the authoritative, that is to say, authentic, proclamation of the Gospel and for the ministry (service) of the sacraments in the name of the Church. I wonder whether such authority needs to exercise power of coercion that is characteristic of the political sphere. In the Church as a community in mission what is essential is participation and coresponsibility of all the people, whatever be the factor that has brought the group together. One can ask whether groups of representatives that symbolize the communion of the Churches at various levels need be made up exclusively of Bishops. Bishops of various Churches can of course meet together for various purposes. But the community can also take other forms with more active and responsible involvement of all the People of God, and this, at all levels. This is not a concession made to the people by the Bishops. I think it is the right of the People of God.

If structures at higher levels than the Churches as basic communities, giving the term "basic community" no other meaning than that of being a basic unit of possible further groupings, are structures of service and coordination, then these structures can take various forms according to the needs of life and mission. The communion of Churches therefore can be lived at various levels, according to the needs of fellowship and mission. While these structures may have to take account of the prevailing political organization in terms of regions and nations for reasons of convenience and efficiency, political divisions need not dictate the forms of Church coordination.

Episcopal Conferences or Conferences of the People of God at various levels can be symbols and can facilitate the exercise of communion, especially at the service of mission. But they need not necessarily be 'national' in a political sense. They can be supra or infra national, especially if we take into account the artificial and accidental nature of many nation-states. The nation-states are not the criteria to determine the structures of communion among Churches.

Lessons for the Church in India

What lessons can we draw from this reflection for the

situation of regional-national tensions. For the Churches themselves, I think we need to promote increasing autonomy and participation in and among the (local or basic) Churches and not imitate political structures of organization and control. As we saw in the beginning, there are many factors in India like language, ethnicity, culture and caste that make it a community marked by pluralism. This pluralism should be respected. As a matter of fact, the caste system has such a strong and lasting hold on India because it protects a certain identity and autonomy of particular groups in a larger social organization. Anthropologists think that the castes may continue as kin groups even if the hierarchical and discriminative system may and should disappear. In such a situation we would argue for a wide autonomy for Churches, provided they are not exclusive. As is happening already, people may belong to many groups at the same time and this may also characterise Church groups. Networks of service and coordinating structures may be set up at different levels. One could think imaginatively without being confined by traditional structures like parish and diocesan Councils, diocesan and national synods, episcopal conferences at various levels, which are organized around the clergy. The political entity of the nation may not be the ultimate point of reference, even though the nation-state, given its power at present, cannot be ignored. But the dialogue partner of the nation-state must be, not an episcopal conference, but a wider body that is representative of the People of God, even ecumenical in its composition.

A Word to Politics

At the political level itself, I would think that recognition of natural groupings of people, allowing them every possibility of autonomy and participation should be the basis of any political structure. This would indicate federal structures of organization at every level. Unlike at the level of the Church we cannot wish away power and control at the political level. But these should be minimal, aimed at the facilitation of free inter-change at all levels, the protection of the economically and politically weak and at the social control of the dominant economic and political structures that always tend to exploit others, especially the poor and the powerless, in pursuit of profit and power. Almost totalitarian nation-states with the power of internal coercion are modern

phenomena. As we see them today, they are in the control of the economically powerful and at their service, even if they have a democratic facade. The lack of real participation and responsibility and the sense of oppression and exploitation is often at the root of regional movements for autonomy. If the nation becomes a service structure then its services will be appreciated. National boundaries too could be more flexible if priority is given to people, their needs and the possibility of their involvement and empowerment in meeting them. One can join the liberals in demanding for less rather than more government.

Unfortunately the Church itself has not developed such effective structures of communion. It can hardly be prophetic in the matter in a credible way. It is politics that seems to be influencing the Church rather than the Church seeking to humanize politics. The regional-national tensions, both in the Church and in the country, however can be opportunities to evolve creatively new structures of coordination, service and communion both at the ecclesial and social levels.

Delhi

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Assertion of the Periphery:

Some Biblical Paradigms

This essay shows how, running all through the Biblical history, there is a tension between a centre, conscious of power, and the periphery with egalitarian ideals and aspirations. Bible views the former as a deviation from the will of God, while the latter as constituting the spirit of covenantal community. Whereas the power centre becomes the object of prophetic denunciation, we note at the same time how the power of God is operative in history in the lifting up of the lowly over against the power-hungry mighty.

Introduction

All along the human history there has been valiant assertion of the people thrown to the periphery against the aggression of the centralized powers with or without success. This phenomenon is experienced by the present generation rather acutely in various quarters across the globe.

This brief essay attempts to serve as a modest pointer indicating some of the paradigms through which the biblical persons, inspired by biblical God, sought to respond to the phenomenon of "the assertion of the periphery against the aggression of the centre". Although an exhaustive treatment of such paradigms elicited from the pages of the bible is well-nigh an impossible task, we try to delineate here the basic biblical orientations handling the above phenomenon. As a result, we might gain certain insights for encountering the contemporary issue of the "Periphery versus Centre".

Paradigm 1:

God's unambiguous gesture of confrontation with imperial centres is in view of evolving a counter-cultural community of the oppressed. These unorganised masses organised themselves with self-governance of egalitarian sharing based on their faith in the same God.

Confrontation and Counter-culture

The foundational vision of the Exodus-community was that the run-away 'am-ha-'aretz (people of the soil) join hands in the communitarian venture of building a just and egalitarian society to be animated by their experience of release from the imperial Egypt and the consequent covenantal allegiance to the redemptive hand of their God Yahweh.

Theirs was designed to be the counter-cultural community still seeking a land for themselves to dwell, against the background of the military-based, totalitarian city-states of the aristocratic nobility or imperial monarchies with high centralisation of power ruling the Ancient West Asia in the thirteenth century B. C. E.

The minority community of slaves and midwives energised by the leadership of Moses in Pharaoh's Egypt is counted to be "an intentional community whose passion for faith is knowingly linked to survival in the face of a dominant, hostile culture".¹ In the very act of countering the oppressive regime and of ushering in the politics of righteousness, justice and compassion, the marginalised seemed to have derived the concept of the one free sovereign transcendent God and become aware of his ethical demands.

Paradigm 2:

The covenantal community of Yahweh sought to serve the legitimate needs of the unorganised and the dispersed, by way of countering the power-concentration with landowning military rulers.

Encountering Power-concentration

The Israelite tribal confederacy living in the promised land (comprised of the immigrants from Egypt or of those militant members withdrawn from the serfdom serving the feudal aristocracy of the Canaanite city-states with military establishments or of both) seemed to have struck a definite chord of dissonance from the land-owning rulers and their political structures in the Canaanite society.²

The security of the individuals and the society of the Israelite league of the tribes depended on the well-knit grass-root kinship

1. W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 29.

2. J. L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Image, 1976) 246-247.

and not on the centralised kingship of the Canaanite model. The political rupture thus created by way of rejecting the kingship was resolved only by the covenantal compassion and righteous commitment directed towards the peasants suffering under the yoke of feudal lords. The Deuteronomic criticism of the kingship (1 Sam 8:11) and the violent hamstringing of the chariot horses of the enemies (Josh 11: 9; 2 Sam 8: 4) manifest their innate repulsion of the high handed militarisation of any force.

The convention of distributing the land for various tribes and its usage within the kinship with a need-based approach seemed to be the eloquent counter-cultural measures against the extravaganza of the vast net-work of land-owning monopolies.

Paradigm 3:

Royal consciousness with its inherent centralisation of power is a morbid development. The singular identity of Israel as a covenantal partner with Yahweh the only Lord, judged monarchy as a deviant departure from God's salvific design.

Deviation into Royal Consciousness

Pre-monarchic Israel was founded on decentralised village community with occasional communal gathering of the common-folk for fighting out the common enemies. In this model the micro sovereignty of the village community was preserved.

With the emergence of Israel monarchy,³ there was a dramatic transition from the modest court of Saul to the centralised rule of David, and then to the proverbially magnificent imperialism of Solomon. It took place even within the short span of a couple of generations. The village economic production supported the village sovereignty in the pre-monarchical period, whereas the same was forced to serve the needs of the standing army and the royal ostentations in the monarchical period.

This monarchical style of rule, in actuality, betrayed the expectations of the powerless commonfolk. The eclipse of the original orientations of Israel as a counter-cultural people through deviant monarchy can be portrayed as follows:

3. Philistine threat was often shown to be the cause of the emergence of the strong military state of Israel. But the on-going consolidation of the central power cannot be justified when there were no such security hazards in the neighbourhood. For, all socio-political changes in a given community (e. g. accumulation of power), need not always be due to the external threats alone.

"If Israel is defined permanently and essentially in terms of its premonarchic arrangement thus categorically stated, then the monarchy will be viewed as an alien imposition, and inexcusable departure, a morbid accretion, an unlawful violation of true Israel. The monarchy was, in a word, non-Israelite. It was an unlawful seizure of the nation by a minority who had forsaken their Israelite identity".⁴

Paradigm 4:

Power-wielders reigning supreme with their customary violation of righteousness and justice were spotted out for prophetic denunciation. The victims of such rulers were comforted by prophetic reassurance with optimistic overtone.

Denunciation of Domination

Israel's prophets⁵ were the charismatic spokesperson (on behalf of God) with the twin commitment to Yahweh's call for a mission and the socio-politico-economic message addressed to the given atrocious context. Rootedness into the heartbeat of covenantal God (avoiding idolatry) and the resultant order of the society or nation (socio-political justice) in favour of the victims of oppression were the twin dimensions articulately emphasised in such prophecy.⁶

In general, the message of early prophets (Joshua, Elijah, Elisha) prior to the later prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah etc.) was directed mainly to the ruling kings responsible for treaties with other kingdoms. In response to their high-level negotiations, the

4. R. B. Coote and K. W. Whitelam, "The Emergence of Israel: Social Transformation and State Formation Following the Decline in Late Bronze Age Trade", *Semeia* 37 (1986) 127. Also cf. M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: A. C. Black, 1960) 165; and J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 187.

5. Equating the "prophets" of Israel to the seers, diviners, ecstatic visionaries, predictors of the future, etc. of the contemporaneous Ancient West Asia is a baseless reductionism

6. Even the foreign (Moabite) prophet Balaam, while being requested by Balak, his (Moabite) king to curse the Israel for advancing towards his territory to enter Canaan was instructed by Yahweh not to do so. Instead, the foreign prophet blessed the run-away Israel group entering into the new region of established kingdom in search of a land for their new existence (Num. 22-24).

former prophets addressed the word of God mainly to the high level negotiators.⁷

But the imperial Assyrian power shifted its foreign policy from top level negotiations with the aristocratic rulers and vassals to direct dealings with the masses in terms of large-scale massacres and deportations in the eighth century B. C. E. In response to this new situation of direct terrorization of the commonfolk, the later prophets addressed the word of God, mainly to the people as a whole seeking counsels and consolation.

The prophetic warnings attacking the power centres — royal courts, villa houses, shrines and Temple — underscored the liberation of the afflicted masses suffering under the oppressive hands of the power-wielders. Rulers both from within and outside Israel were targetted for prophetic admonition for the situations of turmoil and uncertainty they created. For instance, Amos spoke out against Jeroboam II, the king of Israel during 786-746 B. C. E. (Amos 7: 10-17). And Isaiah's voice of dissent during the Syro-Ephramite crisis against the invasion of the Assyrian imperialism (732-701 B. C. E.) affirmed the centrality of the unending Davidic dynasty (Isa. 7: 1-23). Judah's pact with another (Egyptian) suzerainty to deflect the Assyrian aggression is condemned as a "covenant with death" (Isa. 28: 15).

During the calamitous phase of Jeremiah's ministry (627-582 B. C. E.) even the Davidic/Zion theology which was of some importance in Isaiah's vision recedes into oblivion. "Further, his rootedness in the village and country side and his awareness of the sources of Israel's strength and identity as a people and community helped him discern the fundamental errors in the policies of the king and ruling classes",⁸ which stepped up the militarizing endeavours with agricultural surpluses.

Priestly Ezekiel himself being one of the 20000 victims exiled to Babylon around 587 B. C. E. (by Nebuchadnezzar's powerful army which completely demolished the venerable city Jerusalem) underwent the trauma of collective abandonment of Israel. As an 'insider' of the breakdown experience, he attempted

7 For instance, Elijah to Ahab, Elisha to Jehu, Samuel to Saul and David, Nathan and Gad to David.

8. A. R. Ceresko, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Bombay, St. Paul's, 1992) 227,

to transform the drooping spirit of absolute hopelessness of his fellow Jews into an optimistic vision by way of soul-searching in the collective consciousness of Israel in the alien soil. Comfort and reassurance evoked by the prophetic actions and oracles in the minds of the hapless victims amply bear testimony to the unfavourable attitude manifested by the biblical prophets towards super powers and their triumphalistic subjugation.

Paradigm 5:

Religio-cultural resources, tapped by the wisdom traditions at the early stage for pleasing the rulers, were eventually employed to a large extent to energize the victims of the crisis-ridden phases of repeated colonisation.

Wide Scope in Crisis-management

The static system of societal organisation with its associated centralised bureaucratic power structure was the order of the day in the Ancient West Asia during the third millennium. This created the new need of complex scribal skills in order to serve and even to survive the whimsical dictates of autocratic administrators. Survival ethics, success-oriented outlook, pragmatism and diplomacy were the background for the literary products from the pen of the scribes serving the royal needs.⁹

During the transition of Israel from decentralised organisation of tribal confederacy into highly centralised monarchical state, the power-hungry monarchs (David and Solomon) imported the bureaucratic apparatus and the required training for maintaining the status quo through importing the foreign scribes and staffing the necessary infrastructure with them. The wisdom literature flourished from these circles of scribes.

The scribes, belonging to the leisurely class of royal patronage, applied themselves to problems related to a happy and successful life (e.g. the books of Proverbs and Qoheleth), or to the unresolved issues and mystery of life with actual or apparent skeptical note (e.g. the books of Job and Ecclesiastes).¹⁰

9. ANET pp. 90, 407, 412-413, 590.

10. The scribes in association with Deuteronomistic and Priestly circles were instrumental in producing the texts of Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic history and Later Prophets. The production of these texts took place mostly during the post-exilic Period.

By and large, there seems a tendency in the wisdom literature to emphasise an order in everything — nature, creation, life, mystery etc. When this order was conformed to with ethical decisions, well-being and righteousness were supposed to be achieved.

But this 'status quo' wisdom emerging from the elite of royal establishment underwent a painful transformation and became 'subaltern' after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B. C. E. Obviously the post-exilic wisdom is tainted with pathos and tears of oppression in the hands of Babylonians and the Persians. Hence, any genuine rereading of wisdom traditions cannot afford to ignore the *sitz-im-leben* of the politico-cultural abuses heaped upon the victims of colonisation by various empires. And a close probe into the texts of wisdom literature indicates a definite bias in favour of the impoverished as the result of unjust social order upholding the interests of the powerful and wealthy elite.¹¹

Paradigm 6:

The voiceless people, in defence of their religio-cultural heritage and politico-economic autonomy, evolved a new theology of "holy war" to fight against the militarised colonisers even at the cost of their lives.

Independence at any Cost

The so-called 'Hellenistic Reform' imposed by Antioch the power-centre, with the support of the aristocratic Jews sought to transform Jerusalem into a hellenistic city-state (2 Macc 4: 9). Since 175 B. C. E. onwards, Jewish cultural sensibilities and temple sentiments were trodden upon by Antiochus IV the dictator. While some were silently agonised, some underwent martyrdom (1 Macc 2: 31-38) and some resorted to armed rebellion with guerilla warfare.

These rebels were countered by Seleucid military forces (1 Macc 3: 27). But ultimately the rebels gained victory in capturing their dear temple in Jerusalem for restoring its sanctity after its dereliction. This paved the path for the Hasmonean conquest in other parts of Palestine. Even the official annulment of the religious persecution of the Seleucid government (2 Macc 11:16-21, 27-33) did not satisfy the rebels. Their vehement protest supported

11. Ceresko (see note 8 above) 343-388.

by the majority of the local native population ("the many"—Dan. 11: 33-34) was still stepped up against the aristocratic Jews and Seleucid rule on the national, social and political plane.¹² In the ensuing negotiations and battles in view of achieving political independence for Judea, Judas the Maccabean (meaning hammer) hero was killed in 160 B. C. E.

By and large, the rebels readily awaiting to be martyred like Maccabean heroes in defence of their religio-cultural roots, were the rural population suffering under the yoke of exploitative tax burdens of the Greeks supported by the land-grabbing Jewish elite. The force behind the indefatigable assertion of the rural folk was their zeal for revivalism of the original spirit of the *Torah*, given by God to their foreparents.¹³

Paradigm 7:

The irruption of the salvific activities of God enfleshed in Jesus-event rejected any form of domination system crushing the lives of the people at the periphery: it is vibrantly in active solidarity with the 'anawim.

Defiance of Domination System

Here we shall try to sketch out the new force and impulse unleashed by Jesus-event during his life-time and its impact after his death and resurrection.

The core of the new reality proclaimed in a nut-shell by Jesus, the egalitarian prophet, was the dominion-free order of the rule of God.¹⁴ When power was sought after by his disciples to dominate others and especially the poor and the needy, he hastened to reject it (Lk. 22: 24-27). Never did he conform to the leaders' status-driven behaviour craving for the place of honour (Lk. 14: 7-11). Such conduct of the elite seeking the privileges are judged to be unchristian in the early Church (1 Cor. 11: 22).

Jesus' beatitudes, healing ministry and above all the table fellowship with the outcasts of his time¹⁵ are indicative of the

12. U. Rappaport, "Maccabean Revolt", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* IV, 436

13. J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller (ed.), *Israelite and Judean History* (London: SCM, 1977) 58¹.

14. J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1990) 13.

15. Perhaps the salient feature of Jesus' ministry and hence his cruel murder. Cf. N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 107.

irruption of the Reign of God. In marked contrast to his outright condemnation of the rulers' hegemony, we note how the suffering *ochlos* (crowd of powerless masses) enjoyed his compassionate solidarity.

He discarded the royal titles like Messiah and Davidic king (Mk 8: 27-33; Jn 6: 15) or other titles like Rabbi and teacher (Mt 23: 8-10). In short, Jesus, who washed the feet of his friends like a slave, and was murdered as the abandoned servant of Yahweh, neither proposed nor submitted to any hierarchical system with centralized power.

In continuity with Jesus' assertion about the incompatibility of God and Mammon (Mt 6: 24), and his condemnation of the rich (Lk 6: 24-25), the eucharistic communities of the early Christianity practised egalitarian sharing (Acts 2: 44-45; 4: 32-5:11) and offered a privileged place to the *'anawim* (James 2: 1-7; 5: 1-6).

Jesus denied the equation of holiness with exclusivism and legalism practised by the religio-cultural elite of his day. Rather he contravened the pre-exilic holiness code and the practice of purity-pollution system prevalent among the powerful Jews¹⁶ (Mk. 7: 1-23), and defied their mode of gaining further power. And Jesus established a friendly rapport with the social outcasts, the sick, women, gentiles and sinners without any fear of defilement, creating thus a new order of radicalized purity. His followers in the early Church struggled a lot to break ethnocentric prejudices against the gentiles (Gal. 2: 1-10; Acts 15: 1-29).

Jesus' scathing attack aimed at the domineering institutions — Temple, priesthood, legal system — with high centralisation of power working against the interests of the Palestinian peasants. His popularity with the impoverished masses seemed to have aggravated the wrath of the Sanhedrin, the highest religio-cultural assembly at Jerusalem. With a series of false accusations levelled against him "it is clear that Jesus was executed by the Romans as a politically dangerous popular leader and that he was arrested by the initiative of the priestly aristocracy".¹⁷ "They had to kill him,

16. Cf. D. Rhoads, "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries", in J. C. Anderson and S. D. Moore (Ed.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 133-161.

17. R. A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 285.

for Jesus represented the most intolerable threat ever placed against the spirituality, values, and arrangements of the Domination System."¹⁸

Paradigm 8:

Apocalyptic outbursts were the dissenting expressions of a people in despair, tormented in the hands of the colonising rulers. The groans of the victims were not oriented towards resignation but rebellion against imperialism.

Subversive Rebellion

With repeated aggression from imperial dominations (Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic and Roman), the Jews lost the sense of controlling their own destiny and history. This was articulated in terms of certain disgust at the existing order, need for imminent divine intervention, irreconcilable dualism between the good and the evil, inevitability of redemptive suffering, subversive rebellion against despotic powers etc. These sentiments were given expression through apocalyptic literature.¹⁹

The protest of the commonfolk against the imperial Roman tyranny²⁰ in the later half of the first century C. E. gave birth to the book of Revelation.²¹ The earthly powers and principalities with anti-Rule-of-God orientations are negatively portrayed through such symbols as Satan, Dragon, Hades, beasts, plagues, death, Rome, Babylon. When these evil forces reigned supreme demanding an unconditional obedience to them, the poor citizens were deprived of their legitimate socio-political rights and religious-cultural identity. In this context of serious crisis of injustice, the followers of Jesus (the slain Lamb of God) were supported by the theological stance of an uncompromising refusal to dance to the

¹⁸ W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 110.

¹⁹ Apocalyptic thinking was quite actively predominant during second century B.C E — third century C. E. The most prominent expression of apocalypticism in the OT is the book of Daniel, and that in the NT is the book of Revelation.

²⁰ Cf. P. A. Abir, "A Theology of Protest in the Book Of Revelation", *ITS* 33/1 (1996) 43-53.

²¹ "It is more likely that John wrote a peculiar, contemporarily Semitizing Greek on purpose. Such an act may have been a kind of protest against higher forms of Hellenistic culture". L. Thompson, *Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University) 1984. 182.

Satanic tune of oppressive imperialism. This was given expression in the form of apocalyptic writings.

Conclusion

We tried to outline some of the biblical paradigms encountering the phenomenon of "assertion of the people of the periphery against the dominion of the centralized powers". These paradigms can be succinctly recapitulated as follows:

- * God confronts the power-centres; he affirms and organises the unorganised into a counter-cultural people.

- * The covenantal commitment of the dispersed despises the power-concentration of the ruling elite, by creating a self-dependent governance system.

- * Royal consciousness and monarchy are the deviant departure from the original identity of Israel and from the salvific will of God.

- * Power-wielders are to be the objects of prophetic denunciation; whereas their victims, the recipients of the soothing message of prophetic assurance.

- * Religio-cultural resources are to be duly tapped for an efficient crisis-management of the commonfolks while confronting the powers.

- * A theology of valiant confrontation is imperative, if need be, at the moment of serious crisis caused by accumulation and abuse of power.

- * The Reign of God can be said to be tangibly active through the rejection of any form of domination-system and the active solidarity with the *'anawim*.

- * The groans of the people in despair are not the symptoms of resignation but of rebellion against centralised powers.

In sum, the biblical response to the reality of "victimized Periphery versus terrorizing Centre" can be concisely articulated through the conviction supposedly declared by a woman thrown to the periphery during her days:

"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1: 52).

Asymmetry in South Asia - Perceptions and Realities

In this article, written exclusively for *Jeevadhara*, Professor Suryanarayan (a regular contributor to *Frontline* and *The Hindu*, and director of the Centre for South and South East Asian Studies, University of Madras) highlights with examples the difficulties that persist in the bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationships among the nations in the region of South Asia. The asymmetry that is very characteristic in the region with India occupying a dominant position in many respects, is a permanent source of suspicion, fear and feeling of insecurity on the part of its neighbours. Further, there are intricate problems arising from the fact that ethnic and linguistic groups cut across the borders of the countries of the region. In spite of these and other difficulties, the author maintains the importance of regional cooperation, pointing out the model set forth by ASEAN. This requires that we look ahead to the future, and not get weighed down in disputes pertaining to the hoary past.

At the outset, two illustrations to drive home the false perceptions and the blind realities of South Asia. In 1939, as a result of pressures exerted by D. S. Senanayake, A. E. Goonesinha, John Kotelawala and other Sinhalese leaders, the Ceylon Government terminated the services of nearly two thousand Indian daily rated workers. Naturally there was considerable concern in India and the Indian National Congress decided to depute Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the Congress President to study the situation and suggest a just and honourable settlement. The Ceylon Government did not agree to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya's visit on the specious plea that he was a Tamil; in fact, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was a Telugu and not a Tamil. Subsequently Jawaharlal Nehru visited Ceylon in July 1939. The visit was an eye opener for Jawaharlal Nehru; he found not only the Board of Ministers and Government officials but also the Sinhalese political leaders to be "adamant and unresponsive" to Indian aspirations. Despite his frustration and disenchantment, Nehru took a long term view and highlighted the necessity to put the bilateral relations on a firm footing. In a

public speech in Colombo on 18 July 1939, Jawaharlal Nehru declared, "I do not know what the future will bring; but my advice to the people of India is that if the people of Ceylon really do wrong, let us reason with them". He underlined the geographical realities and pointed out: "Ceylon cannot forget that India and Ceylon are close and that India, by her size, is like a giant. It is easy enough to create psychological barriers and ill will, but not so easy to remove or control them. I cannot conceive of any hostile action on the part of India towards a country like Ceylon if it does not threaten her freedom".

It is the tragedy of South Asian history that instead of reciprocating the goodwill, the Ceylonese leaders resented any mention of close co-operation. According to Sir John Kotelawala, the former Prime Minister of Ceylon, "The day Ceylon dispenses with Englishmen completely, the island would go under India". He considered the membership of the Commonwealth "as the first insurance against any possibility of aggression from quarters closer home". In more recent times, the induction of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), on the invitation of President Jayawardene, enabled the Sri Lankan Army to devote itself completely to counter the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) threat. What is instructive for us in India is the fact that military marginalisation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), accomplished at heavy cost of men and materials, did not earn for India the corresponding gratitude of the Sinhalese. On the contrary, it gave a fillip to Sinhala - Buddhist chauvinism and provided justification for the argument that Sri Lanka would soon become the client state of a hegemonistic neighbour. More ironic, in his blind hatred of India, President Premadasa provided considerable weapons and financial assistance to the LTTE and resurrected the frankenstein. Finally both Rajiv Gandhi and Premadasa became tragic victims of the LTTE itself.

The second illustration also pertains to India-Sri Lanka relations. India's over involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is a clear example of the "pangs of proximity"; but the long distance which separated Sri Lanka from Pakistan, United States and China did not provide any enchantment either. Attempts made by Sri Lanka to internationalise the ethnic conflict and encourage the involvement of external powers is an example of

cutting one's nose to spite one's face. When the India-Sri Lanka confrontation escalated in the summer of 1987, Colombo desperately sought the assistance of Pakistan, United States and China; but none of them "even lifted a finger" against New Delhi. The utter helplessness of Sri Lanka was evident from the following statement made by President Jayawardene regarding China's attitude to the ethnic conflict: "They were good friends and gave us military equipments, guns etc. at reasonable terms. But what could they do? I could not ask them to start a border war in the north to keep the Indians busy. Even if I had, I doubt if they would have done it".

II

In contemporary world, no country, however powerful, can chart its destiny alone. It has been the lesson of history that governments can optimise their opportunities and enhance their capacity to shape events, if they join with a group of countries with shared political and economic interests. Regional co-operation, in that sense, does not constitute diminution of national sovereignty, but enhances collective self-reliance. Despite these obvious advantages, the contemporary South Asian scene is permeated with a culture of mutual distrust and suspicion. The international relations of South Asia, since the advent of independence, have been characterised by mutual suspicions, unfriendly relations and, at times, even open conflict.

In this sense, South Asia is a sharp contrast to Southeast Asia, where regional co-operation have made enviable strides. The last nineteen years have seen the emergence of ASEAN as a significant instrument in the regional politics of Southeast Asia. Many commentators have projected ASEAN as a dynamic economic organisation; however, it must be pointed out that ASEAN's success was mainly in the field of political co-operation. The formation of ASEAN itself was a political act, though political co-operation was not specifically mentioned in the ASEAN Declaration. Ghazalie Shafie, the former Malaysian Foreign Minister, mentioned a couple of years ago: "Although ASEAN officials have repeatedly asserted in public that political issues were never discussed, in reality, Ministers were able to wholly or partially settle many outstanding political issues among themselves that might have remained unresolved had they been aired publicly. Since the formation of ASEAN, there have been no contradictions that could cause

serious concern". Explaining the concept of togetherness, which brought cohesion and unity to ASEAN, and more specifically to the pivotal rôle of Indonesia, Ghazalie Shafie added: "ASEAN was likened to a cluster of bamboos, each of which was an independent entity, and which together could withstand turbulent winds; the tallest of the bamboos must always stoop its head. Indonesia is a large country, but it has never imposed its will on the other ASEAN members".

While ASEAN provides a shining example of regional political co-operation, SAARC has yet to emerge as a united organisation. Unlike the cluster of bamboos which swing in unison, the political elites of South Asia have become prisoners of their past and victims of domestic compulsions. Describing the "culture of suspicion" that pervades South Asian political atmosphere, Raj Mohan Gandhi writes, "We in fact picture South Asia as a large ground containing a number of open-air theatres, where ancient scenes are being continually re-enacted, not, sadly, to learn from the past but in order to avenge it. The call is to fight yesterday's battles and reverse yesterday's results ... While much of the world prepares for the 21st and 22nd centuries, South Asia wishes to enter and re-arrange the 12th century".

III

The most striking feature of South Asian scene is the pre-eminent position of India, which bestrides the region almost like a colossus. In terms of area, demographic and economic resources, India is bigger than all the countries put together. India has 78 per cent of the area, 73 per cent of the population and 77 per cent of the gross domestic product of the region. What is equally interesting is the fact that India is at the very centre and all other countries are bordering on its periphery. India's neighbours, among themselves, have very few common attributes and their relations with each other — both economic and political — are very minimal. The crux of their diplomacy is how to gain maximum leverage vis-a-vis India, the central power in the region.

The religious, ethnic and cultural bonds, which cut across national boundaries, have given rise to peculiar problems of national integration and search for national identity. While each country is trying to evolve its own majority-minority syndrome, it is also trying to maintain its psychological distance from India. India's

democracy and federal form of government — despite serious distortions and disabilities — are perceived as threats and sources of destabilisation by the ruling elites in few neighbouring countries; what is more, Indian interference becomes a convenient red herring whenever the rulers are faced with demands of democratisation deteriorating internal situation. It is equally interesting to note that while the Indian nationalist leadership — thanks to the genius of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru — deliberately discarded the religion of the majority community as the basis of nationhood and preferred to pursue a policy of cultural pluralism by carving out linguistic provinces and adhering to a federal form of government, in many countries religious fanaticism and denial of minority rights have increasingly come to the fore. Here again the forces of secularism and democratisation present to India a model, whereas, more often than not, suppression of democratic rights is paralleled with accusations of Indian interference.

Another consequence flows out of the Indo-centric character of South Asia. Most of the contentious issues which vitiate the political atmosphere are and would continue to be bilateral. Issues relating to demarcation of boundaries and illegal immigration, problems of Tamil Nadu fishermen, the Kashmir question, trade and transit between India and Nepal, refugees from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — all these are bilateral. What is more, deterioration in bilateral relations cast their long shadow even during SAARC Summits. The lesson is clear — without overall improvement in India's relations with its neighbours, especially with Pakistan, regional co-operation in South Asia cannot make much headway.

One can understand and appreciate the fears and misgivings that a small country entertains towards its big neighbour. Unfortunately South Asian countries try to involve external powers or become vulnerable to super power manipulation in their desire to offset India's "hegemonistic" designs. No country in South Asia by itself is a security threat to India, but India feels that the involvement of external powers will adversely affect its strategic environment. But with the end of the Cold War, the possibilities of external involvement have lessened.

Given the geo-political realities of South Asia, there is a co-relation between India and the domestic developments in neighbouring countries and vice versa. Instead of insisting on

the abstract idea of territorial integrity, we must recognise that ethnic affinities do not conform to geographical boundaries and developments in one country will have profound consequences on the other. Thus there is a close linkage between Pakistan and Kashmir; Bangladesh with Assam, West Bengal and Tripura; Nepal with Bihar and UP, and Sri Lanka with Tamil Nadu. Keeping these realities in mind and also the cardinal principle of the territorial integrity of existing states, we must strive for constructive interaction. Instances are not lacking in South Asia, when India rendered spontaneous assistance to neighbouring countries in moments of political crisis. Faced with the JVP threat in early 1970's, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike requested assistance from few countries; but the first to respond was India. The swift Indian response enabled Colombo to tackle the JVP threat effectively. Similarly the timely help extended by India to Maldives in 1988 enabled President Gayoom to successfully combat the threat posed by Sri Lankan Tamil mercenaries.

The SAARC Summits have highlighted the necessity for improving people-to-people relations in the region. But there is a wide gap between precept and practice. The artificial barriers, which have been erected to prevent co-operation at the people's level, must be immediately dismantled. Perhaps there is no greater test of regional co-operation in the coming years than allowing people from different walks of life to come together as individuals and groups and learn for themselves the conditions and problems in neighbouring countries. India should provide a lead in this matter immediately; for regional co-operation will have no meaning unless it leads to people-to-people co-operation.

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New Federalist Era in India? Political Travails in the Nineties

In this article, G. K. Prasad (Professor, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Madras), explores the rhetoric of the New Federalist Era in the context of the formation of the United Front Government in June 1996. The article examines how the regional parties surfaced to be in the forefront of the coalition and are making efforts to transform the nature of federal relations in India. The emergence of regional identity has come to stay, and the national parties have been appropriating the regionalist slogans to remain in contention for political power. While, according to the author, it is not possible to be either pro or anti regionalist, emphasis has to be laid on the promotion of democratic institutions, visions and values.

The nature of India's Constitution and the practice of it has always implored numerous scholars to speculate on the 'real' intentions of the founding fathers. The plurality of the Indian society, the diversity of cultures, the growth of plethora of political parties with conflicting ideologies, the whimsical nature of leaders in power have ensured controversies and debates over the relation between the various levels of government in India. While the 73rd and 74th amendments in 1992 may promise and rouse hopes about the local governments, from the states' perspective, the central government enjoyed assertive and dominating role beyond the statutes envisaged in the Constitution. That Central Government depends on the states for the administration and implementation of its several developmental schemes and programmes had not made the position of state governments significantly different. While there have been several opportunities and occasions, particularly during the last three decades, for altering the relationship between the Centre and the states, a serious debate seems to be emerging only recently on the alternative ideas and practices, primarily because the citizens through their franchise forced the leaders and opinion-makers to cogitate afresh. A sense of enthusiasm seems to be pervading that things would change significantly among the believers.

Absence of a clear verdict to any single political party or same ideological group led to ushering in a new wave of interest in regionalism. Academic attention to regionalism has not been consistent and there is enormous unease in discussing it among social scientists. Despite the resurgence of regionalism as a concept, the eruption of more and more regional movements and regional identities, emergence and continuation of strong regional political parties, it is doubtful whether study of regionalism could be made without strong pro and anti sentiments towards such an identity. In political terms, the relationship between state governments and national government has been tenuous and the new challenges posed make one tread the path carefully. The reasons are not far to seek. The Indian Constitution in practice had made the state governments dissatisfied, and they would like the legacy of the 1935 Constitution left behind in the enormously changed social and political situation.

With the passage of time and expanding disparities among the states and within the states, the demands on the Indian state are increasing in terms of claims for state *autonomy*, increased financial resources, decentralization of planning, more independence in administrative areas for which states are constitutionally responsible. Religious diversities, Tribal Group loyalties, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, reinforced the aggressive groups to initiate various demands and protest movements with varying degrees of success. Apart from demands for more powers to the existing states, separate statehood movements emerged in different states. North Eastern states, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Hill districts of Bengal, eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh, Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, Telegana region of Andhra Pradesh witnessed serious movements at one time or the other. Autonomous Councils, Regional Development Boards sometimes acted as palliative. Justifications for regional aspirations for self-rule to Bundelkhand out of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, or special provisions and protection in order to preserve the presumed separate 'identity' are heard often and some of the movements may have significant ramifications.

Regionalism, Identity and Regional Parties

David Miller in his *On Nationality* argued that national identities are valid sources of personal identity, that we are justified

in recognising special obligations to our co-nationals, and that nations have good grounds for wanting to be politically self determining, but claims of nationality do not entail suppressing other sources of personal identity such as ethnicity. Regionalism is one significant identity and regional masks have been employed by many a politician in Indian polity to mobilise and retain political patronage. If historical traditions, religion, economics, political beliefs have not been successful in garnering voters' support, regionalism did fill the void on occasions.

The circumstances in India in 1996 with divergent political parties emerging in the Indian Parliament, with no single party able to get the required majority, had thrown a possible opportunity to explore for the alternatives and a makeshift United Front with a conglomeration of arguably contradictory ideological dispositions. A desire to prevent the BJP from assuming power and avoidance of another election took the shape of fighting for secularism, and in the aftermath a combination of regional, national and Left parties got together. New forces will assert themselves, oppose, break-away, compete, coalesce with others in a bewildering variety of combinations. Few may have anticipated and articulated the need for a coalition of parties but no one knew its ultimate shape.

At the beginning of the formation of the government an image has emerged that power has shifted from the Centre to states, and the head of the government is heading only a presidium of sorts made of state satraps from Madras, Lucknow, Patna, Bangalore and Hyderabad. The method followed in the formation of the Cabinet left little room to imagine the nature of domination. It was hoped that there would be short term programmes with long term design of national reconstruction and resurgence.

National Parties have become more and more regionalised. Congress-I, Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal as well as the Left parties have their own pockets of influence and are struggling hard to widen their spheres of sway. The national parties with their excesses disenfranchised the voters and the problems in the parties in the form of dissidence and rebels culminated in the disastrous showing.¹ None of the major national political parties has cause

1. V. K. Ramamurthy who had differences with the high commands of Congress-I as well as All India Indira Congress summed up: 'Delhi is 2,000 kms away and the perceptions of the State unit and the National high command are bound to be different'. *The Hindu* 6-10-95.

to gloat over its performance. No single party at the Centre would be able to exercise power without the cooperation of states. Political pressures at the local and state level have tried to change the basis of representation at the national level.

Indian National Congress was challenged and even electorally defeated and anti-Congress coalitions were returned to power in different states during the late '60s and early '70s. Both in 1977 and 1989 the Janata Party and Janata Dal governments cracked due to internal bickerings, personal prejudices and clash of rigid ideological stance. Coalitions got bad odour in the process and are generally viewed as unacceptable in India.

The initiatives for greater balance of power between the Centre and the states in the latter's favour were taken by the non-Congress governments particularly the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the left parties in Kerala and West Bengal and other regional parties like Telugu Desam and Asom Gana Parishad later. The regional parties with the main thrust of the policies on welfare programmes, combined with the charismatic leaders, sustained popular appeal and won elections even if they tripped on occasions.

Creation of smaller states based on the principles of political autonomy, socio-cultural homogeneity or administrative convenience is on the agenda of political parties. New State demands in Uttarkhand, Jharkhand, Udayachal, Vidarbha, Gorkhaland, Bodoland, Ladakh and Jammu teased the Indian state time and again. The regional parties have got the opportunity to find out what would happen when some of them get to the Centre and handle the problems. Parties with same ideological tenets find it difficult to function together on a common platform and to get on with the job of running the administration. The feelings of the Congress(I) members of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and West Bengal states where the central leadership is helping the combine of their rivals to stay in power in New Delhi must be strange. Friendship at the centre and enmity in the states had become inevitable in the present context.

Central Government would appear to favour a certain measure of decentralisation or devolution of the power to state governments. Political and economic integration has become a new agenda in the national politics.

Southern states played a crucial role in the post election scenarios of 1991 and 1996 elections perhaps due to less fragmentation in those states. The declarations of the Southern leaders that they would play an important role in the determination of the PM had come true.

The reasons for the divergence in the voting pattern of different states seem to be that there is different agenda for the states. Religion and caste questions dominated in certain states, strong and charismatic personalities in some and the incumbency factors in certain regions. Corruption, welfarism, prohibition, violence, reservations, reaction of protest against peremptory behaviour of central leaders played a role in delivering the most fractured verdict in India's electoral history.

Lack of consensus among UF partners, disgruntled elements, belligerent Congress (I) and agitated left, had their toll to a considerable extent on the performance of the Government. Many UF constituents had already flocked to the Congress-I either because some perceived the post - P. V. Narasimha Rao Congress as different, or they thought that the centre of gravity had shifted. It did not develop a coherent strategy to tackle the problems. However in states among the partners there has been feeling of bonhomie, despite strains like the DMK-TMC sharing of seats in local-bodies elections.

H. D. Deve Gowda, who was the chief minister of Karnataka before emerging as the choice of alternative to the BJP government, with no known qualities of national leadership, survived even after earning the wrath and suspicion of almost all the constituents of UF. While his 'humble' background appealed to many, the streak of authoritarianism, the impulsive acts on personal prejudice were looked upon with consternation by his critics.² Many of his colleagues like Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh, Chandra Babu Naidu, Indrajit Gupta gave vent to their anger in public.

The alliance partners complain of being sidelined in making important decisions and bemoan lack of national vision and

2. Some of his supporters complained that Ramakrishna Hegde's stand against the first Kannadiga Prime Minister is tantamount to working against the state's interests. Even Congress leaders like Jaffer Sharief argued that if Gowda decides to contest from any parliamentary constituency in Karnataka, the opposition should not field any candidate against him.

Karnataka centrism, on Deve Gowda's part. And yet, the United Front is persisting in power because of the logic of numbers. The United Front, particularly during the initial stages emerged as a force on the secular plea. In the context of the short lived BJP government, it has been interpreted by Deve Gowda, that 77 per cent of the electorate had voted against the 'communal' parties and in favour of national and regional secular parties.

There have been sharp shifts of logic on the arbitrary and capricious use of Article 356 which empowers the President of India to declare Emergency and dismiss a duly elected state government if he is 'satisfied' on receipt of report from the Governor of that state that there is a breakdown of the constitutional machinery. Though its employment has been justified on 'high principles' by various Central governments, more often it drew flak on the ground of partisan politics. The regional parties, who bore the brunt of the consequences in the form of dismissal, would like the Damocles' Sword to be removed.

The United Front government could not escape the 'logic' of resorting to the convenient Article in dismissing Suresh Mehta government in Gujarat or imposing it on Uttar Pradesh. The demand for imposing the President's rule, as a matter of fact, is likely to increase as the opposition parties consider it as the only way of removing the incumbent government before the expiry of stipulated period. The confrontationist politics which the Indian society had been witnessing would only resort to the short cuts and obliging Central government could only add to the discomfiture of state governments. The most vocal advocates for the scrapping of the Article in the present context, Dr Farooq Abdullah and M. Karunanidhi may have some supporters in other ruling regional parties but once the stability of the Centre is affected the equations between the central and state governments are likely to change. Unfortunately, even the affected chief ministers have prevaricated over the exercise of the power and when the judiciary has actively associated itself pronouncing judgements over the dismissals of the elected state governments in Karnataka (1989) and Madhya Pradesh (1992), the debate over the situations and legality has become more complicated.³

3. Sometimes the regional parties took stand according to their convenience. While in delddrums, the AIDMK advocated the amendment of Indian constitution

Centre-state and Inter-state relations in the new Federal Context

The uneven distribution of powers between the Centre and the states, particularly of financial powers, had been a major cause of friction for a long time. Conflicts and disagreements are exacerbated by the political changes in the states with the emergence of different political parties and compulsions of various kinds from within. The ranklings and irritations among the states on a variety of issues have been brushed under the carpet with more pressing issues demanding attention. The notorious differences among the north eastern states, the southern states, and minor provocations in many other parts of the country, over claims of boundaries, distribution of electric power, sharing of river waters or construction of dams, as a consequence of greater politicisation over the years since independence, inter-party competition, and intra-party factionalism, competition for scarce resources — these are finding it difficult to realise solutions through the existing political processes.⁴

The Common Minimum Programme of the United Front promised a fundamental restructuring of Centre-state relations and commits the UF to the 'principles of political, administrative and economic federalism'. What are the institutions of federalism which have become active after the new government took over?

Institutions like Inter-state Council, set up to debate Centre-state and inter-state relations had failed to meet during the next six years after October 1990, when it first got together soon after coming into being. The United Front government could convene in 1996 October with more promises to meet often to discuss the problems among the states and resolve them in an amicable manner. While the individual leaders can make more pronouncements on

to provide for a Government at the centre and a direct election of the president. Most interestingly, the AIADMK suggested that the power should be shared properly in the federal government and DMK had not taken any steps towards that direction. AIADMK made its observations in the name of political stability.

4. See Brass, Paul *The Politics of India since Independence*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990; Hardgrave, R.L. and Stanley Kochanek, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation*, 4th edition, New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986, Kohli, Atul *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*, Cambridge, Cambridge Press, 1990, Kohli Atul (ed:) *India's Democracy*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988, Weiner, Myron, *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics* ed. Ashutosh Varshney Newbury Park, CA, Sage, 1989.

their opinions with political overtones, the machinery to implement the decisions or opportunities to settle divergent viewpoints have become non-existent. The Inter-state meet desired a reorientation of the Planning Commission, stressed the need for strong centre and viable states, considered the need for strong institutional framework for Centre-State consultations and conflict resolution. Regional parties like the DMK and the National Conference felt strongly about the manner in which the Article 356 had been used to bring down the state governments and pleaded for its removal. Granting states greater autonomy, devolving more financial powers, have always been on the top of the agenda of the states.

The Inter State Council had expressed support to the formation of the Regional Development Boards and other regional development arrangements within the states for special development thrust in underdeveloped and backward areas. The state Governments are supposed to be fully involved in making these arrangements and in the exercise of powers under Article 371 of the constitution. Standing Committee of the Council would ensure the meetings as often as necessary. Promises of convening National Development Council, implementing/updating the recommendations of Sarkaria Commission have been made. It may try to ensure that the Government works on the principles of federalism, decentralisation, equality and justice with a secular outlook.

However, it is doubtful whether the states are happy over what has happened in the course of few months of the United Front rule in terms of Centre-state relations. Competitive populism indulged in by the state governments would cause much problems to the image of the Government which has so many constituents. The clash of interests between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over sharing of Cauvery water and to a lesser degree Goa, Maharashtra and Kerala on different issues would test the efficacy of the conflict of regional and national outlooks. Strained relations between Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh persist over the height of Alamatti Dam, the sanctioning of money for early completion of the Upper Krishna Project (UKP) under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme. Telugu Desam cannot let Karnataka have its way on the issue of river waters and conversely the Janata Dal will suffer if Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh win their points.

The greatest pressure would be felt by the constituents of the United Front for their inability to protect the interests of their

respective states. As the ruling parties of the southern states are the mainstay of the central government, they would have to face much of the disapproval from the opposition for 'bartering' the interests of the state to continue in power. The AIADMK in Tamil Nadu has been lambasting the two main partners in the United Front government for not being able to get the Cauvery water released by Karnataka, which, in its view amounts to 'the betrayal of Tamil Interests'. Other indictments regard the not safeguarding of the 69 per cent reservation, and adverse repercussions over Telugu Ganga due to Alamatti dam problem, no steps being taken to get major industry for the state etc. All this despite eight central ministers from Tamil Nadu.

Despite stressing on the bilateral settlements, the states too are aware of the utility of central institutions like Commissions, Tribunals etc. Political arrangements like Chief Ministers' Committee, without legal sanction would become problematic, particularly if one of the parties would not subscribe to the views expressed. Whether the regional leaders have state fixation and consider only short-term expediency and are primarily interested in safeguarding the base in the state would decide how they can act in positions of responsibility. The regional leaders would have to learn how to resolve contradictory regional interests of the different regional parties. Perpetual competition among the states for water, power, financial resources, etc. renders lasting, enlightened cooperation highly improbable.

Regionalisation of Politics

Regionalism is rooted in India's cultural and linguistic diversity. When it comes to ethnic and linguistic factors, the ideology and organisational discipline had taken secondary place. One possible explanation of the increase in numbers of regional parties and groups could be manifestation of expressions of the growth of mass politics in India. This reflects the inherent social dynamics of the country with layer upon layer of deprived communities, hitherto submerged in the political substratum at the bottom of the Indian pyramid, making the transition from 'Bharat' to India and demanding their place.

The rise of regional and local parties and the regionalisation of the national parties are likely to give fillip to the movement to buttress states' rights which have suffered both political and economic

erosion over the years. Combined with proper reforms in the various constitutional and administrative institutions, this could transform the nature of governance considerably. Whether by accident or by design Chandra Babu Naidu is spearheading the process of regional parties defining a national role for themselves. They often tend to be inward looking and based on a well-developed cadre or a charismatic leader.

Regional parties have a tendency to relapse into chauvinism whenever they face formidable challenges. Instead of fighting politically their adversaries they have often incited ethnic sentiments. They are as much patriotic as any national parties. They too have stakes to protect the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation. A strong sense of statehood has been rooted more in cultural identity than in either government or territory. Centre's acceptance of Uttarkhand demand is bound to lead to a chain reaction which will see an intensification of demands all over the country.

The regional parties are being challenged by the national parties in their respective states. Except in Tamil Nadu, the main opposition to the regional party is national parties. How do the regional parties play a role in national policies? Would they stop beyond demanding favourable allocations to themselves for various schemes etc.

The weakening of the national party Congress-(I) allowed Gegong Apang, the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh to strike out on his own, hijack the whole party and convert it into another regional party. Even the states which had different preferences for the state and national assemblies felt that the regional parties can represent them even in Parliament. The people have responded to the issues and personalities of the state in the absence of strong, charismatic leaders or/and cohesive ideological conglomerations. By and large, individuals at the constituent level did not count to the voters, and they voted decisively on chosen criteria.

What would be the impact of federal arrangements on the dynamics of multi-party system and the consensual character of policy making? In multi-party systems, elections could have less significance in determining programs, and interest group influence is strengthened and the possibility of decisive action reduced. A truly federal government can protect the people's interests in a

composite culture which is multi linguistic and multi religious. The creation of a Federal Front within the United Front, would only show the priorities of the regional political parties.

The political parties are trying to adjust some of their objectionable policies and programmes and promises, and attempting to experiment with the art of peaceful coexistence. Compromises become unavoidable and aggressive tendency to espouse the cause of specific support bases may give way to a more mature all-inclusive approach. While the government has not fallen, differences of opinion surface often on many issues including economic policies, Kashmir, appointment of individuals to positions of power, statement on Uttarkhand, announcing decisions without consulting the United Front steering Committee.

It is not appropriate to conclude from the emergence of United Front that secular, federal, pluralistic and democratic forces triumphed. Its character would change once the survival of the government itself is threatened and some of these values would have to give in. Chandra Babu Naidu, Convener of the United Front at one time could envisage that Shiv Sena could join the Federal Front and the prime minister could have parleys with the Shiv Sena leader. As no single national or regional party is able to get a working majority, alliances have become absolutely essential. Whether the alliances are unprincipled or whether the alliances would smother rough edges of extremism and temper the ideological stances of alliance partners leading to better governance would depend on how the people respond to the stances of the political parties and policies. None of the major national parties are opposed to the regional parties *per se* in the context of their inability to get clear verdicts even if they had criticised them of their 'pernicious ideology' from time to time. As their support bases also are getting limited to regions, they are immersed in consolidating the gains and are slow in extending their base in other regions. Hindu chauvinists do not want the regionalists to practice regional chauvinism.

Conclusion

The plurality of the Indian society seem to reflect in the corridors of power at the central government. The prime minister cannot be unmindful of the sensitivities of the coalition partners. From the perspective of decentralised, accountable administration,

there would be a definite change for the proper parliamentary form of government where the prime minister would be first among the equals. The Union Ministers could have more autonomy, and imaginative and resourceful individuals would be able to contribute to policy-making independent of the Prime Minister's Office. However, the ideological divergences among the 13 parties cannot be wished away. Compromises to appease and to placate one or the other would hamper proper administration. The chosen instruments to guide the parties and government have to be active and greater reliance on collective thinking has to be resorted to more often. The Steering Committee has not been able to function effectively. It has not been productively used to resolve disputes or to get concurrence on various ticklish issues. Public infighting would wane people's confidence in the new system of governance and they would have to fall back only on known instruments in the absence of viable alternatives. This might be a dire need as fractured mandates seem to be emerging as a general rule at all levels of democratic governance and the society has to be prepared for it. Accommodative, discussion-friendly, democratic, decentralised perspectives have to emerge. The success of regional parties or practice of federalism depends on what happens in the society and in other institutions.

As Putnam's study of Italy *Making Democracy Work* shows, how when the Italians regionalised their political system in 1970, it was those regions with the great civil traditions and rich in social capital, with dense networks of clubs, associations and civil groups (including trade unions), that exploited the opportunities best. In the poor south, the typical unit is the individualistic inward-looking nuclear family which stays aloof from civil life — and those regions were less successful. The decline of social capital infects economy and society alike.

Inexperienced democratic states have been grouping to find the ropes on how to tackle political disagreements. Political processes are still in a flux and the new power seekers would have to look into the society to draw sustenance. Absence of adequate civic initiatives in opposing authoritarianism, independent initiatives and quasi public debates and civic responsibility are major reasons of worry. Any democratic government would do well to inculcate values such as tolerance and civic and democratic temper in the people.

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Christianity and Regionalism

The question of regionalism is different in the various parts of the globe — each one assuming its own particular contours determined by the constellation of concrete factors and forces at work in the particular part of the world. It is not the purpose of this article to study this contemporary global issue, which in a way has pushed itself to the foreground of the consciousness of humanity. Here I would limit myself to the experiences and realities of India, and try to relate the issue of regionalism to the Christian praxis and understanding.

When we speak of regionalism we need to say in the same breath nationalism.¹ They are co-relational concepts. Obviously the relationship among them varies very much depending upon the country. What does regionalism really mean in India, and in which direction the Christian involvement should tend in the context of what appears to be a polarization between the forces centered on nationalism and the demands of regionalism — this will be part of my reflections in this contribution. The article is presented in the form of five *sutras* — basic statements — followed by reflections and illustrations.

Sutra 1:

Christianity should not now aim at belatedly to be nationalist in the manner of the nationalism that characterized the nineteenth century and early twentieth century Independence struggle. Christianity today serves the cause of nationalism through its commitment to regionalism.

1. It is difficult to define nationalism and even more so regionalism. How these realities are understood will be clear from the treatment of the subject matter in this article in relation to our experiences in the country. There are three traditional approaches of regionalism based on "homogeneity, nodality or polarisation around some central place, and programming which is concerned mainly with administrative and political coherence" (B. Pakem, *Regionalism in India*, Har-Anand Publications, Delhi, 1993, p. 9). But the fact is that no single definition of regionalism lends itself for general application. (Due to space-constraint I have limited drastically foot-note references in this article).

The national struggle for Independence was a complex phenomenon with different streams and forces contributing to it. It cannot be reduced to the mainline scheme of historiography according to which certain national leaders created the nationalist quest and prepared the Independence agenda, only to be followed by the masses. Without undermining the role of the leaders, it must, however be recognized that the mainstay of the nationalist movement culminating in Independence was the work of innumerable battles and struggles waged by simple and heroic groups such as peasants, tribals, the working-class,² which all gradually led the colonial government to the conviction that India could not be governed by the British anymore.

The broad stream of nationalist movement had place for various groups and peoples to contribute to it. As for Christianity, barring some individuals, the overall attitude to nationalism and nationalist movement ranged from indifference and scepticism to articulate opposition. This is to be set against the overall background of Christianity of the times. With the leadership of the Christian Churches mostly in the hands of missionaries, the long-standing general policy was not to get mixed up in the local politics which could prejudice the cause of the advancement of the Christian Gospel. On the other hand, there was mutual cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial government. The missionaries considered the British rule as beneficial to India and the colonizers could count on such zealous and committed band of women and men as missionaries for the works of education, social welfare etc. That explains why, as Elizabeth Susan Alexander points out in her well-researched work,

"caution, moderation and a basic conservatism are unmistakably visible running through the attitude of the vast majority of Protestant Christian missionaries towards Indian nationalism. Most missionaries tended to avoid commenting on controversial issues such as the Rowlatt Act of 1919 or the administrative excesses in the Punjab the same year, and also to shun discussion of comparatively radical subjects such as the Self Respect Movement..."³

2 Cfr Bioan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*. Penguin Books. Delhi 1990. For several interesting case studies. Cfr R. Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies* Vols I—IX. Oxford University Press 1982–1996

3 Elizabeth Susan Alexander, *The Attitudes of British Protestant Missionaries*

There were individual Indian Christians who challenged such attitudes and orientations of missionaries vis-à-vis nationalism but the majority of them appear to have fallen in line with the missionary thought and arguments. Not only was the joining of National Congress viewed with discomfort, but one even went to the point of condemning the non-cooperation movement. We read in one of the resolutions of the All-India Conference of Indian Christians, the following:

That while admitting that there are some causes for the present discontent in the country, the Conference of Indian Christians strongly condemns the policy of non-co-operation as proposed by the special session of the Congress held in Calcutta in September last and is decidedly of opinion that it is impracticable, unwise and unnecessary and is suicidal to the best interests of the country ⁴

One can dispute and reserve judgement about what has happened with the nationalism of the times of Independence struggle and the role played by Christianity. However, nationalism is not something that is over with the Independence struggle. What came about in the immediate post-Independence period could be characterized as the second wave of nationalism. It was the period where the slogan of "nation-building" resounded everywhere. As for the Church, it did contribute much in this phase by way of widening its educational, health-care and developmental works, and it won due recognition for such services. Further, it started paying greater attention to the plight of the backward classes and groups.

But today, I think, we have entered into a third phase of nationalism which is much more complex and difficult than the first two. This third phase of nationalism concerns the creation of a national community by forging new relationships among the various regional groups and other collective identities. In other words, in this third phase of nationalism, the foremost thing is to settle matters *inter nos* — among us. It is to this new phase that Christianity should today move and make its fresh and creative

Towards Nationalism in India, Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd, Delhi 1994, p. 102.

4. M. K. Kuriakose (ed.), *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*, CLS, Madras 1982, pp. 322-323.

contribution. Obviously, this phase is much more challenging because many delicate and politically complex issues are involved.

Now the important point to note is that this third phase of nationalism can be built up only in and through commitment to regionalism. This is what has transpired from past fifty years of Indian experience, especially the last two decades. There is no much point served by reviving the spirit of the first phase of nationalism. Instead Christians need to concentrate their attention on the growing regional tendencies in the country.

A narrow conception which tends to identify nationalism with monolithic paradigm of unity, may see in regionalism nothing but "secessionist trends", "terrorism", "insurgency" etc. There is no denying the painfully conflictual situation with a lot of violence and destruction in different parts of the country as in the North East, Kashmir, Punjab etc. Further, there are regionally based movements such as the claim for Jharkand by the tribals, the demand for Bodoland in Assam, for Gorkaland in Bengal, Chhatis-gaah regional movement in Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha movement in Maharashtra, Telengana movement in Andhra Pradesh, Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu. These are issues for which solutions elude us at the moment. These are, however, symbols of an underlying broader issue of regionalism, an issue into which we need to go in depth.⁵ Understandably, from the point of view of administrators and rulers, regionalism can often prove to be a thorn in the flesh. But the whole nation need not be put into the mould of administrators and executives. There is a deeply human and collective aspect to regionalism which we need to learn to appreciate.

The new developments in the country and the shifts that have taken place are enough indications, why Christianity in the country needs to address this changed situation by concentrating its attention on the regional issues, and through them contribute to the development of this second phase of nationalism that we are going through. More about it in the following pages.

Sutra 2:

Commitment to regionalism as an integral part of nationalism derives both from the spirit of the Indic

5. Cfr. Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist. Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast*, Viking, Delhi, 1994.

civilization as well as from the spirit of the Christian message.

There are several researches and studies which clearly indicate the causes for the assertion of regionalism.⁶ Just to name a few: Regional assertion could be bound up with economic disparity, political autonomy, ethnicity, historical, linguistic, cultural and psychological differences. The point to note is that even if we succeed in overcoming some or all such causes which foment discontentment, regionalism in its positive aspect needs to continue. For regionalism is the life-blood on which our vision of nation as a comity of peoples and cultures will have to rest.

We need to distinguish two types of nationalism, and this is important to approach in the proper light the question of regionalism. We could observe two streams of nationalism at work in the struggle for Independence: a religio-cultural and a liberal-secular. There was a confluence of both these streams which built up the momentum for the emancipation from the colonial power. But with the passage of time, the religio-cultural and the secular-liberal got more and more distinct to the point of getting polarized. Each of these two approaches to nationalism has got its own vision of what the Indian nation is, and what its future should be. In its polarizing and anti-secular form, this stream is represented by the ideology of Hindutva nationalism.⁷

Both these types of nationalism cannot come to terms with our situation in India today. I am not entering into the reasons why Hindutva is not capable of maintaining a nationalism that is respectful of all the divergent groups represented in the country.

6. Cfr. Lalchungnunga, *Mizoram. Politics of Regionalism and National Integration*, Reliance Publishing House, Delhi, 1994; Phanjoubam Tarapot, *Insurgency Movement in North Eastern India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1994; Balraj Puri, *Kashmir. Towards Insurgency*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1993; G. Pakem (ed.), *Regionalism in India*, *op. cit.*

7. Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, Viking, 1996; W. Andersen — S. D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*. Vistaar Publications, Delhi, 1987; Seminar 442: *Nationalism, A Symposium on Religion and Nation in Post-Ayodhya India* (June 1996); *Concilium*, Religion and Nationalism, 1995/6; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996; Ninian Smart, *Religion and Nationalism*, Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies, Rome, 1994.

This point need not be belaboured here. What I would underscore is the need to imbue the secular nationalism more and more with the spirit of our tradition and cultural heritage. To be able to understand the implications of this, we could usefully draw a distinction between India as a modern political-national entity and India as a civilizational reality. The present-day India as a nation owes very much to the emergence of the modern institutions of nation-states in the West.⁸ The creation of this institution in the West with its symbols and rituals (flag, national anthem, parade with ritual exhibition of weapons...) was extrapolated into the Third World colonies. What is more important is to note that the basis of the Western nation-state is the individual as citizen. It is precisely here that we require to bring in the reality of India as a civilizational reality. A civilization encompasses many and divergent cultures and traditions, and it goes beyond the relationship of individual citizens to the nation-state as in the case of modern state-formation in the West. The concrete reality of the Indian nation-state should reflect the reality of India as a civilizational entity. It is here that the various regions of the country with their own history, tradition, language become an integral part of the definition of India and the understanding of it as a nation.⁹ As C.D. Deshpande observes, the efforts to identify the various regions of the Indian sub-continent have been there from very ancient times.

The Epics as well as the Early Buddhist and Jain literature also mention regions and their names... No less interesting is the list of countries given in the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta. The accounts of the early Chinese travellers also contain references to some parts of India. In the South, the 'Sangam' literature describes the limits of 'Tamilaham', the ancient Tamilnadu, and its various smaller regions, the 'nadas' of the larger cultural entity.¹⁰

8. Cfr E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

9. It is interesting to note that in some of the Western countries like Italy and Spain, there is taking place a regionalization of politics. The case of former Yugoslavia is well-known. Cfr the article of G. K. Prasad appearing in this issue of *Jeevadhara*.

10. C. D. Deshpande, *India. A Regional Interpretation*, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Delhi 1992. p. 1.

The experience of diversity symbolized in the regional realities has gone into the texture of Indian cultures and their various expressions. It is the spirit of pluralism which has sustained and nourished the Indian civilization. The pluralist spirit of Indian civilization cannot be sacrificed on the altar of a monolithic modern nation-state. Neither the modern nation-state centered on the citizen, nor the mono-cultural reduction of India as a nation-state in the manner of Hindutva ideology has any future. An Indian appropriation of the modern institution of nation-state is feasible only in and through the Indic civilizational spirit of pluralism emanating from regional diversity and other group-identities.

Regionalism, contrary to the general impression, is closer to the spirit of Christianity. The Jewish antecedents of Christianity go back to the Old Testament roots of the nation of Israel which was no homogeneous entity. The nation was an umbrella concept that came to cover the actual reality of a *federation of tribes*, each one marked by a name, identity, characteristics and area of habitation.¹¹

This diversity and pluralism is taken over in the New Testament, and the twelve disciples of Jesus were to represent symbolically the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. To this should be added the newness Christianity represents vis a vis the Old Testament tradition. It is the unambiguous recognition of God's speaking to the various peoples of the human family through a plurality of ways. A central symbol of this new reality is the Pentecost. Now, Pentecost is not an event in which the various nation-states were united. In this sense, it was not a "united nations" before United Nations. The concern is not about the nation-states as units of governance; rather the accent in the whole narration of the event is *on the people representing various regions and cultures* of the then known globe. Luke takes pain not only to underline "other" tongues but also to enlist in detail the various peoples characterized by their regional belonging as if it is very important for the significance of the event. So we have the listing of "Parthians, Medes and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, of Judea and Cappadocia, of Pontus and Asia, of

11. Cfr. The impressive research of Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh. A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B. C. E.*, SCM Press, London, 1980.

Phrygia and Pamphylia, of Egypt and the part of Libya close to Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Jews as well as proselytes, Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2: 9-11). The well-known Biblical scholar, Jacques Dupont concludes his excellent study of the narration of the event of Pentecost with the words:

The economy of the Spirit no longer tolerates the supremacy of one tongue or a single culture above others; rather it appropriates them all. For now on it will be unnecessary to become a Jew in order to enjoy the blessings of the Covenant; it will no longer be necessary to adopt the language or customs of any one people rather than another. It will be enough to listen to the Spirit speaking and follow his inspirations.¹²

The Spirit of Pentecost permits us to view positively the regional realities in our country and appreciate them. But it should be added that much of the history of mission has been unfortunately, contrary to this spirit and has, in practice, maintained a mono-cultural model. In this sense, it has been a counter Pentecost practice. Nor can we rejoice that today the situation has changed in any appreciable way. Recognizing the regional diversity and drawing consequences from it remains still an unrealized ideal within Christianity itself. Commitment to the cause of plurality in the country will help to live and practice the genuine Christian spirit of appreciation of diversity.

The cause of regionalism derives also from another Christian theological consideration — the principle of creation. God has created the world, nature and the universe with endless varieties. At a time when our world is being threatened by the extermination of its marvellous bio-diversity, we become conscious of plurality as part of the divine plan. This diversity is very significant for the survival of the world, because of the whole network of mutual dependence. Reduction of the varieties into one uniform and monolithic model through coercive external interventions could only spell disaster for the world.

As far as human beings are concerned, the God-given potentialities of a people, a group in interaction with their traditional habitat leads to the creation of culture with its many external

12. Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles. Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, Paulist Press, New York, 1979.

expressions and evolving of a symbolic universe unique in itself. The creation of the modern political entity of nation-state cannot override this basic diversity. The manifold regional expressions of life of a people are basically response to God's double gift of the spirit in human beings connected with the umbilical cord of the materiality of a particular region. There is no culture which is born independent of the physical reality of a natural region. Even when this physical closeness is not possible, we note how there is always a spiritual affinity in the life of a people with the region into which their culture was born. It is not for the institution of nation state to try to undo and steamroll such a diversity within the parameters of a narrowly defined nationalism.

Sutra 3:

Regionalism and nationalism represent two sets of values. They are both valid. However, in the present circumstances, there is the need to highlight and strengthen the values which regionalism symbolizes. Christian contribution should today tend in this direction.

Nation-states have become an undeniable modern fact of history. As autonomous and sovereign entities, they have become important instruments today in the governance of people. They are the points of reference in international relationships. They have and will continue to retain their validity as a binding force, even if the developments in the direction of globalization seem to eclipse the role of this important political institution.

The validity of regionalism consists, among other things, in the creative force it represents. When a people or a cultural, linguistic or ethnic collectivity becomes conscious of its distinct heritage and characteristics, this poses a challenge to the status quo and calls for change at many levels and different areas in the life of the nation-state. Further, in India, the regional forces have become important in effectively practicing a democracy that respects the concrete realities and experiences of the country.¹³ One of the chief reasons for the assertion of regionalism is the economic inequality in development policies and practice.

13. Cfr. A. K. Baruah, "A Note on the Impact of Regionalism on Parliamentary Democracy in India", in B. Pakem (ed.), *Regionalism in India, op. cit*, pp. 60-66.

Regionalism highlights the need for equitable sharing. Precisely because the present model of development tends towards seriously undermining the identities of peoples and their selfhood, their legitimate claims in decision-making, in short, their being subjects of freedom rather than objects of suspicion and control by centralizing national forces, no effort should be spared to safeguard and promote their issues and concerns. Christianity could play a timely role in this regard.

This point could, perhaps, be best illustrated with reference to the involvement of Christianity for the marginalized peoples, specially the tribals. While dalits are scattered all over the country, the tribals are in general concentrated in certain areas and regions. The involvement of Christian missionaries among the tribals is well-known. In recent times, the activities of Christian missionaries in the North-East of the country have become object of national attention, specially in view of what is feared as secessionist trends in that part of the country with a sizable Christian tribal population.

People who observe the situation in that region without prejudice do not fail to recognize the yeoman service rendered by Christian missionaries to the tribals of the area in terms of education, social welfare etc. The presence of Christian missionaries has been an important factor in the awakening of the tribals and sharpening of their awareness of their plight. Now, linking up the secessionist tendencies among the North Eastern tribals with the Christian presence becomes problematic. Many things need to be taken into account.

In the first place, as Roy Burman, a well-known expert on tribal issues, rightly observes:

From a structural analysis, it is immaterial whether certain agencies like foreign missionaries or the emergent middle class have been involved in the postures of defiance on the part of the small communities concerned. Even if these agencies were not there, more or less similar developments would have taken place. It is significant to note that in Burma, one of the most important ethnic groups defying the authority of the

14. B. K. Roy Burman, "Integrated Area Approach to the Problems of the Hill Tribes of North-East India", in K. Suresh Singh (ed.), *The Tribals' Situation in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1990, pp. 72-73.

Central Government, is the Shans, who are Buddhists of the same denomination as the other Burmese.³⁴

To this we can add the fact that even before the times when the tribals became Christians in large numbers, they have led vigorous battles and rebellions against the British rulers to protect their identity and legitimate interests. It has now only continued even after many of the tribals have become Christians. Their new religious identity has not created what appears to be their defiance vis-à-vis a centralizing rule. What is true is that through such means as Church-run educational institutions, the tribal self-consciousness has been heightened.

Secondly, there are well founded and serious grievances on the part of the tribals and the way they have been treated by the rulers and by the rest of the country. While the violence being perpetrated cannot but come under severe condemnation for the harm being done to the innocent people, one cannot, however, stop at that. Equally to be condemned is the violence inflicted on the tribals in the name of law and order under the pretext of containing insurgency. Having said that, we need to ask the reasons behind and the processes at work in the desperate acts and recourse to violence on the part of the tribals.

Such an analysis will bring to the surface many factors. Economic factor will be certainly one, but not the only one or the most important one. But pumping in money into the North-East and doling out benefits is no lasting solution. After all, all human problems cannot be solved by money. The situation of the tribals need to be viewed sympathetically. There is the need to respect their identities, recognize their special situation in the light of historical antecedents and cultural backgrounds. Above all there is the need for a sustained political dialogue for the tribals to feel emotionally and to live willingly and freely as integral part of the Indian nation. In the absence of the political will for facing the legitimate regional aspirations, finding alibi for the situation in the region or laying the blame squarely at the doors of missionaries may not help.

Thirdly, if the impression continues about the role of Christian missionaries for the turbulence in the region, it is an occasion for Christianity to examine critically its own approach and policies, and its theology. For, if in praxis, the religious

interests and concerns are allowed to dominate, or mixed up with the socio-political and cultural issues and processes of the tribal groups, this could raise suspicion and may lead one to think whether the secessionist trends are more for the sake of maintaining the *Christian identity*, rather than an expression of the aspirations of the tribals. The matter could be aggravated and could take on a clear communalist turn, when slogans such as "Nagaland for Christ" are voiced. This could bring the zealous and well-intentioned involvement of the missionaries in the region under the cloud of suspicion, and it could ultimately prejudice the regional aspirations of the tribals and their relationship with the rest of the nation.

If elsewhere Christianity follows a monolithic model of unity and is supportive of regionalism among the tribals, it cannot but fall into contradiction and lead to critical questioning whether what is being done in the tribal areas is for the sake of tribals as such, or is it more for the expansion and consolidation of Christianity as an institution with the swelling of its numbers through what is named as "proselytization". This impression could be removed only when Christianity, not only in the tribal regions, but all over the country commits itself to the cause of regionalism and the values represented by it — something which as I noted earlier is in tune with genuine Christian spirit of diversity and pluralism.

Further, even if one may not subscribe to the chauvinism of "sons of the soil", we need to read the signs of the times in different parts of the country. A purportedly universalistic approach which sweeps through the whole country with no respect to the regional and local language of the people, their customs and traditions cannot but be called into question.

Sutra 4:

Regionalism is not opposed to nationalism. Nor is it opposed to the Christian spirit of universality. What is required is a redefining of nationalism in India taking into account the experiences of regional reality. On the other hand, there is the pressing need to re define the dominant Christian understanding of universality in relation to the regional, local and the particular.

Whether regionalism or nationalism, the point is that they both need to be weighed on the balance of universalism that respects every human being and the place of human groups and collective identities. Nationalism by itself does not mean that it is closer to the ideal of universality. Nor regionalism, on the other hand, opposed in itself to this ideal. To what extent nationalism can become narrow and can cause extermination of peoples and races is amply testified by the history of the twentieth century connected with the horrors of two world wars. Even before such disasters came upon our world, Tagore foresaw where an unbridled nationalism could lead, and therefore expressed his vision for India in these terms:

India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe that I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity... We in India must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide.³⁵

The task therefore before us is to re-define nationalism in India in the spirit of universality and humanism. Precisely when this happens, such a nationalism will have as its substance a solid regionalism. Tagore made his point with a very telling analogy: "Our ideals have been evolved through our own history... If we cherish the desire of paying our all to buy a political nationality it will be as absurd as if Switzerland has staked her existence on her ambition to build up a navy powerful enough to compete with that of England..." (!) We need to evolve our own characteristic Indian vision of nationalism and not ape other forms. We cannot sell out or sacrifice "our all" — the diverse ethnic, regional and other identities for consolidating a foreign-inspired nationalism. The strength of Indian nationalism will lie in its attention to regional realities. The political developments in the country connected with the election in June 1996 has brought, if not by the inspiration of ideals, at least through the constellation of many contingent factors,

15. Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*: Rupa & Co. Calcutta, '99' (original of 1917), pp. 83-84.

the regional reality to the forefront. The regionalism followed by the politicians may have its own power-agenda. That aside, the developments in the country provide a new platform and opportunity to develop creatively our own version and practice of nationalism.

In its history, Christianity has been often tempted by the splendour of universalistic and imperial models of unity. A Church historian like Eusebius was so much taken up by Constantine's empire that he saw in it not only God's providential instrument for the expansion of the church but apparently also the very realization of Jesus' vision of God's Kingdom.¹⁶ It has been difficult for the Church not to let itself be seduced by the model of Empire for its own practice of unity. Expressions may vary, but this archetype of unity has always been there. But faced with such a multi-cultural society as India, we begin to realize more sharply than elsewhere perhaps, the limitations of any such model. A Christianity anchored in a monolithic pattern of unity cannot be an instrument of the new challenges and task we face in the country, and which bear upon the recognition of the legitimate regional realities and experiences.

Similar reflections could be made in regard to the ideal of universality. The modern, specially the nineteenth century Christian understanding of universality came to be centered primarily on geographical expansion, and it served also the apologetic purpose. In India, for Christianity it was the phase of institution-building. It was the beginning of numerous Church-related institutions and establishments. Religious congregations and societies, the chief agents of mission-work in the Catholic Church, were dominated by this spirit of universality which shaped their attitudes and values, policies and programmes. This understanding of universality seems to dominate even today in many religious congregations. This is true not only of international congregations, but congregations and societies of local origin as well. These latter seem to make their own the dreams of the nineteenth century geographic universality by allowing themselves to be dominated by expansionist considerations.

Universal was certainly the message of Jesus, but when he died on the cross he did not speak in what were then "universal"

16. Cfr. Eusebius, *Storiā Ecclesiastica e i Martiri della Palestina*, (edited by Giuseppe Del Ton), Desclée — Editori Pontifici, Rome, 1964.

languages — Greek and Latin. Rather his last words were in his regional and local dialect — the Aramaic, his mother-tongue. The Evangelist records the very words of Jesus: *Eli Eli Lama sabachthani* — Lord, Lord, why have you forsaken me (Mt 27: 46). We cannot but be struck with the contrast of what the rulers of the time did: to fix their "universalistic" language of Greek and Latin onto the cross of Jesus in the form of a mocking declaration: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of Jews (Mt 27: 37).

We need to realize today that there is not only a breadth, but also a depth to the world, to the society. That Christianity is present everywhere in the world or the country need not be apologetically proved today. But the challenge is the *universality of depth*, and that means going deep into the lives of the people of a particular region, their local language, culture, tradition, history, ethos etc. Christian universality requires today to be defined in terms of the depth it reaches in the life of a region, its sharing and participation in the life of the region, its concerns, its aspirations. It embraces also the many conflictual experiences and realities. Unless in practice, there is a shift to a new understanding of universality, Christianity may not be able to contribute effectively to the regional cause. It will be, so to say, precariously hovering over all the regions with a dated aircraft of universality, and not really taking the plunge in the life-stream of the region. This implies that the way Christianity is structured and operates would need to undergo a profound transformation. A re-interpretation of universality in terms of regional concerns will also call for transformation of values and of spirituality.

Sutra 5:

Regionalism is a complex canvas and may not be circumscribed in every case solely in terms of homogeneous language, ethnicity and religion as criteria. These criteria should not contradict the basic principles of justice. In promoting regionalist aspirations, Christianity cannot neglect the basic ethical demands in terms of justice.

We need to take into account the realpolitik of regionalism. Any struggle or popular, regional movement does not happen according to pre-determined rules and regulations. It is marked by the vector of conflicts, violence, blood-shed and hopeless inner

divisions mixed up with vested interests and greed for power and control. This could be seen in any part of the country, whether it is the Jharkand movement or regional movements in the North East. There are bellicose factions in various communities which unleash inter-group and inter-tribal rivalries. All this need not, however, undermine the real issues behind such ambiguities but only calls for a continuous catharsis of regionalism through the waters of justice.

The development in today's world is breaking down the traditional boundaries and the borders have become fluid. There has been and continues to be migration of people from one part to another for various reasons. Sometimes we have large ethnically and linguistically different groups settling down in one area traditionally occupied by people of another ethnic, linguistic and cultural background. A case in point is the situation in Assam. Further, there are outstanding grievances and mistrust stemming from the past history. In these and similar cases, the linguistic, ethnic or other similar criteria connected with *primordial loyalties* need to encounter the real situation of the presence of other peoples, cultures in the region. Such situations can be very delicate and painful with claims and counter-claims. Every situation is unique and needs to be treated as such. However, in general, we can say that any settlement and understanding would be respectful of basic principles of justice, human dignity and rights, and these include collective cultural rights. These can never permit anything like "ethnic cleansing". Further, in concrete, one has to distinguish between types of migrants — whether it is a powerful minority exploiting the local people and draining them of their resources and robbing them of their opportunities, or whether it is a poor and defenseless migrant-workers and displaced people struggling for their survival.

On the part of Christianity, commitment to regionalism cannot contradict the other moral obligation of promoting justice. All this would imply a positive and creative political role on the part of the Christians and the Church. Not in few regions and localities of the country, the Church enjoys much confidence and trust of the people of the area, transcending religious barriers. This is most evident in the case of North East, or in our neighbouring country of Sri Lanka. The Church cannot shy away from playing

a mediatory role of political reconciliation and cultural understanding among the peoples. It can help the process of an effective political dialogue. It is the failure to come out openly for the cause of justice and the legitimate regional aspirations, that can lead to suspicion whether it is really involved in the issues of the people, or whether it wants to be always a hesitant Church never seriously plunging into the situation, but all the time weighing between the safeguarding of its interests as a religious institution and the burning issues of the people. On the contrary, the efforts of the Church to mediate and reconcile in difficult circumstances will not only serve the cause of justice and regionalism, but will ultimately be also a great contribution to integration and harmonious cohesion of our country.

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Book Reviews

Ninian Smart, *RELIGION AND NATIONALISM*, Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies (Chavara Lecture Series No. 5) Rome, 1994, pp. 94.

The author, professor of Religious Studies, University of California Santa Barbara, brings together in this volume the six lectures delivered at the Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies in Rome. He picks up for study four different cases on the problematic of religion and nationalism and weaves his reflections into the analysis of each one of them. The result of this methodology is a book that is very illuminating and at the same time well-grounded on the complexity of the contemporary experience. The four instances he takes up for study are symbolically represented by the names of four cities whose names already say much: Ayodhya, Belfast, Jerusalem and Sarajevo. These four instances constituting the subject-matter of four central chapters are sandwiched by an introductory chapter on "Burning nationalism and religion as one kind of fuel", and a concluding prescriptive chapter on "Religion must give up communitarian spirit and pray".

In this review, I would like to highlight because of their direct bearing for us in India, the author's position of the general theme and his analysis of religion and nationalism in India.

Nationalism in many respects resembles religion. For, like religion it thrives on sacred and mythical narratives (for example the way national history is traced and projected), rituals and symbols; it commands the loyalties of the masses as the sacred world of the religion does. Wherever religion becomes the basis for national identity, we have what the author calls a "double-decker" nationalism. This is the case, for example, in Sri Lanka, Ireland, Pakistan, Indonesia, etc. By double-decker nationalism the author implies that nationalism in itself is already a kind of religion and it is further consolidated by traditional religion and the sense of identity it confers on nationalism.

We can identify three elements underlying nationalism: language, religion and history. It is not that in every case all

the elements are equally present. Nationalism in concrete assumes different combinations. Thus we have the example of Italian nationalism which is not based on religion as in many other cases. Catholicism could very well have been the basis for Italian nationalism. But what history shows us is that the *Risorgimento*, the movement for unification of Italy as a nation developed through a conflict with religion and religious institutions, leading to the loss of the territories of erstwhile pontifical states to become part of the Italian nation.

As for India, besides pointing out such factors as the British rule, development of the railways, the author highlights the re-interpretation of Vedanta by Vivekananda in the formation of the Indian nation-state, furthered later by the contributions of Radhakrishnan and Gandhi. The spirit of pluralism (which is the quintessence of the secular in India), enshrined in the Vedantic understanding of reality and the concept of two levels of truth, offered a new basis for the unity of India as a nation. In comparison with many states with double-decker nationalism, the Indian experience, in the view of the author, has been very commendable in that it did not go in the line of an identification of the majority religion with the reality of its nation-state. This state of affairs is due to the spirit of pluralism and universal humanism generated by the re-interpretation of Vedanta through Vivekananda. But the author also sadly observes that the grand vision of Vivekananda seems to be eclipsed today by the emergence of Hindutva movement which wants to undermine the spirit of universality and pluralism.

Against the backdrop of the world-situation today one cannot but agree with the author on the importance the pluralist vision in its new interpretation has played in saving India from falling into the temptation of a narrow nationalism circumscribed by religious identity. Let me express the hope that this pluralist vision will be maintained in spite of the provocations from fundamentalist forces from the different religious traditions.

What the author says is right, but the weakness is in his omission. I think that the Vedantic re-interpretation is only part of the story. It certainly deserves commendation. But the merit should be shared. I mean there is the history of assertion on the part of the various ethnic, linguistic and regional groups

which made it clear through their struggles and claims that India could have a future as a nation only with due recognition of plurality. This point is driven home often by subaltern peoples and groups. Their sustained struggle even today keeps alive the reality of what India is, a plurality of peoples, languages, regions, etc. who create the nation through the culture of mutuality and dialogue.

The book has maintained the oral style of the presentation of the lectures. Particularly remarkable is the clarity with which most complex issues are addressed by the author. The work is very readable and full of insights. It can be read profitably by political scientists, social scientists as much as by religionists.

Christopher Jaffrelot, *THE HINDU NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND INDIAN POLITICS 1925 TO THE 1990s*, Viking, Penguin Books India, Delhi, 1996, pp. xxii + 592.

This large and impressive volume covering over six hundred pages is based on the doctoral dissertation of the author who now teaches South Asia politics at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. The work investigates the strategies followed from the 1920s till today by the Hindu Nationalist Movement. He analyzes not only the relative success and failure of the strategies but as well the mutual influence of the various strategies adopted. His study goes into the exploration of other socio-political conditions and environments which either helped to promote or neutralize the strategies.

What are now the strategies followed by Hindu nationalist movement? The author distinguishes between a moderate and a militant Hindu nationalist movement, each one having its own particular approaches. The moderate stream followed the strategy of a tie-up with Hindu traditionalists, co-opting prominent personalities like the princes and taking up populist socio economic issues. On the other hand, the militant wing of the movement followed a three-fold strategy. The first one the author takes up for consideration is what he calls "stigmatization and emulation". By this he means the way the aliens — concretely the Muslims and Christians — were perceived and characterized. They were seen as a threat to the Hindu identity. But at the same time, the Hindu nationalist movement tried to emulate the very "alien" religions

it opposed. The militant stream, in the words of the author, "re-defined hindu identity in opposition to these 'threatening Others' while — under the pretext of drawing inspiration from a so-called Vedic 'Golden Age' — assimilating those cultural features of the Others which were regarded as prestigious and efficacious in order to regain self-esteem and resist the Other more effectively" (p.6). This development is something new in Hinduism itself, which has always manifested a unique capacity of assimilating the "Other", different to such an extent that this "inclusivism" prevented the emergence of a collective identity and solidarity as "we". The departure the militant movement represents rests on this new approach to an unassimilated "Other" as threatening.

The second strategy is the ethno-religious mobilization. It is the attempt to rouse the popular Hindu sentiments in favour of the nationalist movement, and it is within this frame one can situate the issue of Ayodhya or the transformation of the figure of Rama into a hero for modern times. The advantage of this strategy is that it tried to move beyond the upper and middle class urban base of the Hindu nationalist movement, in order to reach out to the general masses. The third strategy consisted in building up the movement and its political expressions through a national net-work of well-trained and dedicated cadres and activists. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) with its affiliated unions (for example, BMS, ABVP, Seva Bharti), is an important component of this strategy.

Depending on the need of the hour and the general political climate one or other strategy assumed greater prominence. They were often used in various dosages and combinations. Besides, certain accommodations in terms of political alliances were necessitated as for example when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) joined with the Janata Party to oppose the Congress and come to power. The author goes into the many intricacies of the interplay between the Hindu nationalist strategies and the political developments. By way of example, I may cite here some factors which, according to the author, fuelled the Hindu nationalist movement and its growth, and others which neutralized it. Among the former are to be counted such incidents as mass-conversion to Islam as happened in Meenakshipuram in 1981; the case of Shah Bano which based the legality of judgement on Islamic religious laws; and in more recent times the effort to implement the

recommendations of Mandal Commission Report in favour of the backward castes and classes.

The tilting of Congress ever more towards communal politics and populist ways to ensure its vote-bank was yet another important factor in legitimizing and strengthening the Hindu nationalist movement. As for Congress it was a sad departure from its earlier secular orientation strengthened by the vision of Nehru and others in the decades immediately following the Independence. This breach of the secular vision and ideals went in favour of the Hindu nationalist movement.

On the other hand, there are another set of factors which caused the dampening of the movement and its effectiveness. At least two factors can be recalled here. The actual exercise of power by BJP in states like Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, contrary to the promises made, proved to be anything but impressive. Secondly, the Sanskritic upper culture Hindu nationalist movement represented and its support base among the elites and the middle-class exposed it in the eyes of the backward castes and classes. It failed to really muster enough support from the lower strata of the society.

The author is apprehensive of the way the media and other means are used to strengthen the impact of the Hindu nationalist movement at the level of its grassroots workers and cadres, which could in the course of time pose a serious threat to the multi-cultural society of India.

This well-researched work with a maze of informations and detailed analyses and interpretations, is further enhanced by an excellent index, which makes the reading of the work easier. The work is updated through an epilogue that traces the development since 1993.

This is a work not only for political scientists. Given the importance of the subject-matter it cannot but be of lively interest to all those who are concerned about the developments in the country at the present moment and its future trajectory. The lessons the study imparts based on hard facts need to be taken seriously by all religionists.

Felix Wilfred

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